



1st May 2014

Dear Friends,

In recent days I have been approached by many close friends of Israel with questions about recent developments, concerned that with the breakdown of the peace talks with the Palestinians, Israel is entering a new and possibly turbulent period. For this reason I want to take a moment to share some thoughts on these developments with you.

To place these thoughts in context, though, I would preface them with a reminder which I am sure is unnecessary for most of you. As we approach Israel's 66th Yom Haatzmaut, Israel truly has an incredible amount to take pride in and to celebrate. The recent warm visits to Israel by Prime Minister David Cameron and Leader of Opposition Ed Miliband, along with a host of government and shadow ministers, are also a wonderfully positive sign of deep cooperation between Israel and the UK.

Still, despite the remarkable achievements of Israel, one of its dreams has yet to be fulfilled: that of peace and security with our neighbours. This dream is deeply embedded in the heart of every Israeli, particularly those who send their children to serve in the armed forces or who, like most Israelis, know someone killed or wounded in battle or in an act of terrorism. Israelis know that such a peace will require concessions, just as the existing peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan did. For that reason, Israel's government has, for the past eight months, not only engaged in a genuine peace process under the auspices of the United States but has expressed its commitment in a series of practical measures, including most painfully the release of Palestinian murderers.

Israel has continued these efforts even in the face of troubling signs that they have not been matched by a similar commitment on the Palestinian side. Indeed, on some issues, there was a decided hardening of Palestinian positions, with President Abbas's refusal to recognise or even discuss the issue of Israel as a Jewish state raising serious concerns about his commitment to the fundamental concept of two states for two peoples. As Israel's cabinet was about to meet to finalise the last and most painful release of prisoners, Palestinian leadership reneged on its fundamental commitment to resolve status issues at the negotiating table by seeking upgrades in 15 international organisations. Nonetheless, Israel remained committed to exploring every opportunity to move towards peace. Yet, just as these efforts looked ready to bear fruit, President Abbas took a tragic step away from peace when he embraced the Hamas terrorist movement.

Hamas, it should be clear, is a terrorist organisation committed to the destruction of Israel in both word and deed. Its covenant states that "Israel will exist until Islam will obliterate it" and "the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgment Day." These aims are reiterated regularly by its leaders. Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's de facto prime minister in Gaza, recently proclaimed that "thousands of fighters above ground and thousands of fighters underground have been preparing in silence for the campaign to liberate Palestine", while this week veteran Hamas leader Mohammad Al Zahar denied that Hamas has moderated any of its position, insisting that Hamas would never recognize Israel or renounce violence.

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Hamas's heinous philosophy is not just rhetoric. Even as President Abbas was negotiating his deal with Hamas's leaders, seven rockets from Gaza struck southern Israel, damaging several shops and disrupting Passover services in the city of Sderot. Since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007, over 7,000 rockets have been fired indiscriminately at Israeli targets, placing Israel's southern towns under continual bombardment and posing a constant threat to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Peace at its core is about making tough choices. Israel has shown its willingness to make these choices. President Abbas, too, needs to make a choice: he cannot embrace a terrorist organisation and still demand legitimacy as a sincere negotiator. Israel has not closed the door to negotiations; we fervently hope that President Abbas will recognise that the way to fulfil Palestinian aspirations is not through unilateral measures but rather genuine dialogue.

Dear friends, though we genuinely hope that President Abbas will reconsider, it increasingly seems that he has neither the will nor the capability to take the steps necessary to engage in peace. It seems likely, instead, that we will again find ourselves in political and public relations war of attrition, as the Palestinians seek to gain in international fora the change in status that they refuse to pursue at the negotiating table.

As we have seen in the past, such a dynamic is unlikely to bring either side closer to peace or prosperity. Decades of hostile initiatives in the international plane have not brought the Palestinians on the ground any change whatsoever. Such progress as has been achieved has been only the result of the face to face negotiations and the tough choices that the Palestinian leadership is seeking to avoid.

At this time, we appreciate your support, and your help in ensuring that the current situation is seen here in the UK with clarity and with principle. In particular, it is vital that UK leaders recognize that Hamas, a recognized terrorist organization, is ideologically committed to Israel's destruction, and cannot be a partner for peace unless it renounces its credo of violence, recognizes Israel's right to exist and respects Palestinian commitments.

Similarly, it is vital to send a message to UK leaders, to international organizations, and to the Palestinians themselves, that bilateral negotiations and not unilateral campaigns remain the only route advancing Palestinian aspirations.

On the eve of Israel's Independence Day, I thank each of you for the support that has helped make Israel what it is today - a miracle that our parents and grandparents could scarcely have imagined. At the same time, I ask you to continue to express your support, with a proud and clear voice, so that their most coveted dream – of peace – may yet be fulfilled.

Yom Ha'atzmaut Sameach!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Daniel Taub'.

Daniel Taub

Ambassador to the Court of St. James's

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