

# Why Peacemaking Can Be Painful

I was in Washington, D.C., last week when reports on the arrival of a group of other Israelis in the U.S. capitol made front-page news. While I was warmly received by a wide array of people, including journalists at CBN and leaders from the National Religious broadcasters, my trip was not the focus of the media's attention.

Rather, it was a team of high-level negotiators from Israel to sit face to face with a parallel group of Palestinians, the first time in years that Israel and the Palestinians actually sat down together face to face formally to try to overcome the differences and even broach the idea of making peace.

Despite my trip not being in the news, my presence was a catalyst for seeking my thoughts, comments and observations about the news among those with a heart for Israel.

I share the prayer and hope of most Israelis that one day we will actually have peace with our neighbors, and I know for a certainty that most Israelis will be ready to make painful concessions if the possibility of peace were actually in reach. Yet I, like many Israelis, don't see too much reason for hope in the short term.

One of the most challenging parts of the negotiation, just to return to negotiations, is Israel's agreeing to release 104 hardcore terrorists, many imprisoned for decades for murdering and maiming other Israelis. Doing so has opened old wounds and renewed the pain and grief of the families of the many victims of these terrorists who will now go free, and who will receive a hero's welcome when they go home, celebrating their murderous acts of Palestinian nationalism.

It's perverse that Israel is releasing these terrorists in

order to coax the Palestinians back to talk with us about making peace. As painful as this is, one could make the case for doing so in the implementation of a final peace agreement.

However simply to release terrorists to get the Palestinians to agree to talk about peace makes a mockery of Israel's deep sense of justice. The arrest, trial and imprisonment of these terrorists for serious crimes was all done under Israeli law, yet now they are being set free. One would think that if the Palestinians really want peace and to live side by side with Israel, they would do everything and anything possible to resolve differences, rather than wait years to negotiate terms just to talk about making peace.

Releasing hardened terrorists also sends chills up the spine of any parent of a young man or woman currently serving in the IDF, or who will serve, as it weakens operations to track down and arrest other terrorists, whether after the fact, or based on intelligence that they are about to act. These operations are done at considerable risk to the elite forces who carry them out as well as those, often Arabs, who provide the necessary intelligence.

Not only does the threat of arrest, or serving a full sentence once arrested, not serve to discourage people from joining the terrorists, it may outright encourage further acts of terrorism as the perpetrators may rightly look at Israel with little fear or consequence of their actions, or actually assess that the "penalty" is well worth the crime, if caught.

Certainly, it's possible that any of these could consider serving 10-20 years in a comfortable Israeli prison with cable, three halal meals, air conditioning, and the ability to study toward an advanced degree as being well worth it, even an incentive to go ahead and kill a few Israelis.

Of course, just by being an Israeli in D.C. does not give me any unique insight into what was and has been taking place

behind the scenes to get to this place. It's a very uneasy situation and one about which I don't know too many people who are happy. Speculation is rife with ideas that Israel had to bend to the U.S. in order to demonstrate that it was really trying so that when the time comes to act on Iran, the U.S. will do the right thing.

Everyone understands that Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas is a weak leader who governs with little legitimacy (his term as president ended years ago but there have not been any elections since, so he sits in his office with no constitutional legitimacy), and one who probably looks over his shoulder all the time as his Hamas brothers threaten to do to him what is happening in Syria and Egypt. By tossing Abbas this bone, the theory goes he could have the standing to be so bold as to actually negotiate peace with Israel, which many Palestinians oppose and many Israelis don't see him able to uphold.

There is a hope that in the context of Israel releasing these Arab prisoners, as part of this deal President Obama will do the right thing and pardon Jonathan Pollard, an Israeli American serving a sentence so far in excess of what others convicted of serious crimes, it's hard not to imagine anti-Semitism playing a role. While Palestinian terrorists' release is legitimately a mockery of justice, so too is Pollard's continued imprisonment. Pollard's release could certainly give Prime Minister Netanyahu something to show in response to the mounting protests against the terrorists' release.

Whatever may come, I pray that the God of Israel, whose covenant with Abraham grants Israel more legitimacy than most if not all modern nation states today, will grant wisdom to do the right thing.

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