

OPINION/EDITORIAL

Principles Exist Outside the Box

By Kenneth W. Stein

My son says his Jewishness is based on how we behave toward others, what we do. We have beliefs, principles, and even faith but it is our actions that matter. In deciding what is appropriate, how do we balance what we do for our-

selves first with what is morally just for others? If there are two powerful purposes, sitting side by side, how do we prioritize them?

If you want Israel to have secure and recognized boundaries and you want the Palestinians to have self-determination in their own

contiguous state, are you doing the Palestinians an injustice by applying a solution rather than negotiating one? Is it the means or the outcome that counts? And does that matter, if lives are being saved or bettered?

These issues recently melded at a Friday night service in New Mexico. For the sermon, the rabbi read an email letter, which presented a history of Jewish suffering and of sustaining the Jewish state. The letter proclaimed Israel's steadfastness against wars, violence, and farcical condemnations. It rhetorically asked, "Why have Jews not been left alone to pursue their own lives, free from physical violence and threats?"

Slowly, a somber mood challenged the brightly lit sanctuary.

The rabbi engaged congregants' hesitant reactions; responses heavily favored hope and talk therapy. If there were voices for the use of force, they were virtually silent.

Across the sanctuary, a young woman's voice broke with emotion, "I am 'sick' about the violence perpetrated against Jews, but peace will prevail." A synagogue official cogently advocated Israeli restraint in its relationship with the Palestinians. Another man said that a long-term solution would only come if the Palestinian economy was bolstered. The young college girl, with long red hair behind her pierced ear, reflected on her recent sojourn to Israel and how every Israeli was vigilant in public places. "All we have is hope that the situation will get better," she said. In the back of the sanctuary a woman remarked that an agreement with the Palestinians is not possible because the Israelis elected Sharon. In the verbal minority, a man in the front row chimed in that Israel had to be strong and use its muscle for its own defense. Another was deeply troubled that the Arabs living in Israel did not have civic equality with Jewish citizens. One middle-aged woman blamed a local newspaper for biased reporting and advocated boycott of it until editorial policies changed.

Gingerly I raised my hand. My New York-tinged delivery and strong advocacy of political separation was nothing like the "b" in subtle. "Excuse my participation," I said, "I am a guest from Atlanta. Perhaps we need to recognize the reality that Palestinian and Israeli clocks are not synchronized for negotiations; they are in different time zones and will be for some time to come. Ninety-eight percent of the Palestinians want to return to their homes or villages in pre-1967 Israel. And Israel does not want to give up being a Jewish state. Negotiations won't change those facts.

"Israel should separate unilaterally, if necessary, from the West Bank and Gaza, and even from Arab neighborhoods in east Jerusalem. Separation would provide the Palestinians a contiguous state. It would remove some of the responsibility Israel shoulders for impeding Palestinian economic and political development. Separation is neither a political or military solution; it is an interim stage until Palestinians and Israelis can find each other in the same

time zones.

"Israel will not fulfill Palestinian dreams for an independent Palestinian state in all of historic Palestine/Eretz Yisrael; Palestinians will not provide security adequate to Israeli needs. Neither side is capable of destroying or removing the other from the area west of the Jordan River. Israel cannot swallow the Palestinian population and remain a Jewish state. No American or other mediator can make a negotiated agreement work if both sides are not ready to compromise.

"The populations must be divided. You can call it partition, disengagement, or separation. Oslo was intended to result in negotiated separation. A negotiated settlement is, of course, preferable. Separation is not a perfect solution and it does not guarantee an end to the violence. It must be applied in a fashion that does not prejudice a resumption of a future Palestinian-Israeli talks."

When I finished the last congregant spoke with equal passion. He said, "The answer is separation. Negotiations will prevail. We must have hope in the future." Prior to the kaddish, the rabbi who had already acknowledged how troubled he was by the state of affairs in Israel, nonetheless, incredulously concluded, "I still believe, as I said last Rosh Hashanah, that Palestinians and Israelis will reach an agreement before the end of the Jewish year." Was the Rabbi feeding my latent prejudice that some will always propose "kum-ba-yah" solutions to all disputes, regardless of reality?

Congregants had heard a dreary tale of Palestinian-Israeli strife, violence, terrorist attacks, assassinations, and death. They anguished at the death of Israelis. This did not change the mystical hope that talking, logic, and reason would prevail. Either those who spoke did not see reality or they would not let it interfere with their moral beliefs that logic and reason will always prevail. Instituting separation is not morally wrong. It can enhance the well being of Israelis and Palestinians. Israel requires the political courage and will to remove some settlements and declare a contiguous Palestinian state. Separation is appropriate and necessary. ✪

Kenneth W. Stein teaches Middle Eastern History and Political Science at Emory University.

The View from Israel

What Was Oslo All About?

By Carl Alpert

Haifa - Much of the discussion in recent weeks has centered around Oslo. There are those who insist that Oslo was a historic breakthrough in our relations with the Palestinians, and those who insist that it was a tragic surrender to hostile neighbors. What was Oslo?

In 1993 a small group of unofficial representatives of Israel met in near secrecy with a similar group of Palestinians in the Norwegian city and with the informal but actual blessings of the Norwegian government. They discussed the possibilities of an agreement between the two parties leading to mutual recognition, peace and cooperation. The discussions were long and animated. Demands were made, accusations were voiced, but the goal was to reach an agreement. And finally, almost at the last moment, a text was produced. The Israelis pre-

sented it to their government; the Palestinians to Arafat and his group. The next step was to formalize the agreement.

That took place at the White House in Washington on September 13, 1993, when a joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed by both sides. In informal talk that agreement has been referred to simply as Oslo.

The document is long. It contains 177 detailed Articles, and added lengthy Annexes and an additional eight paragraphs of thoughts - but signed by both sides.

Highlights from Oslo (the DOP): The two sides "agree that it is time to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights and strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual

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