

American Leadership Needed for Middle East Peace

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Proverbs 29:18 states; "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The Bush Administration's lack of understanding of history and the politics of the Middle East has resulted in a policy that has left America isolated in the region and threatens our critical ally Israel.

On the eve of my departure from Israel, I was asked to share my thoughts on the week I had spent meeting with Israeli political and military leadership, Palestinian Prime Minister Fayed and President Abbas, and most importantly the Israeli people themselves. Over the course of the trip, it was made clear to me that Israelis recognize the necessity of a two state solution in ensuring their democracy's survival.

The national mood is somber as Israelis question their ability to achieve peace with their neighbors. I reminded my guests that it took nearly 2000 years for the prophecy of a Jewish state to be realized and as Israel has only been in existence for 60 years, they should not despair. Nonetheless, Israel now finds itself more vulnerable than ever.

Iran has called for the elimination of Israel and is close to building a nuclear bomb capable of carrying out that threat, according to American and Israeli intelligence reports. Alarmingly, the world community has failed to take action to stop Iran's nuclear program. The newly elected Sarkozy government in France underscored the danger of a nuclear Iran by announcing that force against Iran should be considered to stop nuclear development. Israel also sent Iran a clear message that it will not tolerate hostile regimes possessing nuclear weapons by reportedly conducting a preemptive air strike on Syria's fledgling nuclear program. Without American leadership, it is clear that the world's inaction will likely result in continued escalation.

The divide between Palestinian rivals, Hamas and Fatah, has intensified. In a repeat of the mistake made in Iraq, the Bush Administration pushed for premature Palestinian elections, which resulted in the Iranian backed terrorist group Hamas taking over the Palestinian government. Civil war between Hamas and Fatah followed. Today, the Palestinian territory is partitioned with Fatah ruling the West Bank leaving Hamas in charge in Gaza.

Last summer, the terrorist group Hezbollah operating in southern Lebanon and armed by Syria and Iran, attacked Israel. The Israelis retaliated and fighting ended in a stalemate. The Bush Administration again missed an opportunity to rid Lebanon of Hezbollah when in 2005 the Lebanese people took to the streets to protest Syria's assassination of their former Prime Minister. On a mountaintop in northern Israel overlooking Lebanon, I could see Hezbollah rebuilding their positions.

President Bush must provide the diplomatic leadership necessary to avert the nuclear crisis with Iran by getting the world to enforce tough economic sanctions. This week the House passed a bill that I co-sponsored which forces the President to impose tougher sanctions against Iran. The U.S. should also diminish Iranian strength by supporting the Palestinian Fatah Party's efforts to regain the support of their people. These rouge regimes will only change course when they see

America's resolve to rebuild our military and end our involvement in fighting a civil war in Iraq.

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