

COMMENTARY

No. 436

Monday, 26 June 2017

The Unfinished Six-Day War:

An open letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu

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Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

Since you celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the victory of the Six Day War, did you ponder what this triumph has done to the Palestinian people and to the moral character of the state of Israel? I am not sure how harshly history will judge you, but one thing is certain—I, like millions of Jews around the world, deeply believe that no prime minister of Israel has done more damage to the country’s future security and wellbeing than you have. The sad irony is that for you, the facts on the ground are freely expugnable in your morally distorted universe.

Fifty years have passed, and as the longest serving prime minister, you have not yet articulated any vision about Israel’s future and the fate of the Palestinians. Instead, you find comfort in hypocrisy, pretending to do what is right and defending your ceaseless lying and twisted logic, making a virtue out of falsehood. Remember Netanyahu, a moral leader does not cheat or mislead, but takes a clear position regardless of how unpopular it may be—but you have pursued policies where nothing is beyond the pale.

You profess to support a two-state solution and that you are ready to negotiate unconditionally, but everything you have said or done over the years stands in total contrast to that notion. How do you reconcile a two-state solution with your statement, “I think that anyone who moves to establish a Palestinian state today, and evacuate areas, is giving radical Islam an area from which to attack the State of Israel”? And when you were asked during the last elections in 2015 if no Palestinian state would be created under your leadership, you said: “Indeed.”

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In your speech to Congress in May 2011, you stated that “This is the land of our forefathers, the Land of Israel, to which Abraham brought the idea of one God, where David set out to confront Goliath, and where Isaiah saw a vision of eternal peace.” During the same speech, you fervently proclaimed that, “In Judea and Samaria, the Jewish people are not foreign occupiers.”

Tell me, how do these statements conform with the idea of a Palestinian state to be established on the same land, when you have no intention of ever evacuating any settlement? You reconfirmed that in September 2016, stating, “The Palestinian leadership actually demands a Palestinian state with one pre-condition: No Jews. There’s a phrase for that: It’s called ethnic cleansing.”

You use national security as a blank check to spread fear by portraying the Palestinians as the greatest danger that faces the nation. “In order to assure our existence,” you stated, “we need to have military and security control over all of the territory west of the Jordan [River].”

How much weight should the Palestinians put on your presumed readiness to negotiate a two-state solution, when in the same breath you emphatically demand from Abbas that he must first recognize Israel as a Jewish state? As you said, “the real core of this conflict... is not this or that settlement, or this or that community, it’s the persistent and enduring [Palestinian] refusal to recognize a Jewish state in any boundary.” Both claims are untrue and unfounded.

If the negotiations were to start without any pre-conditions, how could you claim that “Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish people”? On another occasion, you stated that: “[Israel] didn’t occupy Jerusalem fifty years ago, it liberated it...I want to tell the world in a loud and clear voice: Jerusalem has always been and always will be the capital of Israel.” If you remove the future of Jerusalem from the negotiating table, is it not that a pre-condition?

You continue to proclaim that the settlements are not an obstacle to peace. Can you explain by what miracle the settlements will not prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state with a contiguous landmass, especially when you continue their expansion and rule out the evacuation of existing settlements?

To be sure, Netanyahu, your desperate need for reaffirmation of your dubious schemes and bigoted attitude leads you to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and a sense of vulnerability among the Israelis so you can rally the political support to stay in power. If this is not the trademark of a demagogue, then what is? Aristophanes put it well when he stated that: “You [demagogues] are like the fishers for eels; in still waters they catch nothing, but if they thoroughly stir up the slime, their fishing is good; in the same way, it’s only in troublous times that you line your pockets.”

You demand the Palestinians behave and dare not resist the occupation, but what have you offered in return? You refuse to release political prisoners; you refuse to halt the expansion of settlements; you refuse to provide the Palestinians permits to build, and you refuse unrestricted mobility of Palestinians, not to speak of the daily ordeal to which they are subjected. If you wanted real peace, Netanyahu, shouldn't you have used the fiftieth anniversary to make at least a good-will gesture, such as releasing a few hundred Palestinian political prisoners to give hope that new, brighter, and happier days may dawn?

You ought to recall what Frederick Douglas once observed: “where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.”

To blame the Palestinians for the lack of peace is hypocritical at best. What is it that you want from them? They are at Israel's mercy; they have nothing left to give. You, Netanyahu, have the power to propose a framework for peace. No country or combination of countries in the Middle East can expect to defeat Israel militarily for the foreseeable future. If you do not negotiate peace from strength now, then when?

Peace based on a two-state solution is not a favour to the Palestinians—it is fundamental to Israel's long-term national security. Without peace, you jeopardize the Jews' nationhood for which so many have suffered and died.

Remember this, Netanyahu: nearly 80 per cent of Palestinians and roughly 70 per cent of Israelis were born under occupation. What sort of Jewish state are you creating? A state which is in the business of oppressing other people, because people like you portray them as the eternal enemy?

Have not the Jews lived long enough to know the meaning of being persecuted, incarcerated, segregated, expelled, and sentenced to death? Are you suggesting that the Palestinians are an irredeemable foe, and we the Jews must oppress and humiliate them to be safe and secure?

No, Netanyahu. What you are subjecting the Palestinians to day in and day out defies Jewish values, defies what is moral and right, defies logic, and defies the very reason why the Jews struggled to survive for millennia to have a home of our own.

You and your blind zealots are utterly ignorant of what we must stand for. They are destroying brick-by-brick the only country that offers a refuge to every Jew who seeks to live in a free, democratic Jewish state. The occupation does not make Israel a free, safe, and independent state, but a prison with fences and wall and bunkers and shelters, with tens of thousands of soldiers on the ready to kill, to raid, to destroy.

Why?

Because you want to make the Palestinians the eternal enemy, only to support a warped ideology that wantonly ignores their unmitigated reality. Yes, the existence of the Palestinian people is a fact that you cannot wish away. Does it ever occur to you that they want to live a normal life without fear, without dread, and without anxiety and concerns? Does it ever occur to you that the continuing occupation feeds into the frenzy of extremism? Would we the Jews have acted any differently under brutal occupation?

As one who claims to represent not only Israel but world Jewry, don't you have the obligation to offer a vision as to where you are leading the people of Israel? And what should Jews around the world, in whose name you claim to speak, expect five or ten years down the line?

Given the continuing tense and dire situation in the territories, it is only a matter of time when the next bloody conflagration will happen. The blood of every Israeli and Palestinian man, woman, and child will be on your hands. No one else is to blame for your paralysis to act but you.

You cannot blame your lunatic and outrageous hard-core ideologues partners like Bennett, Shaked, and Lieberman, who refuse to see the light and choose to live in the dark, not knowing what's in store for them. They put a leash around your neck and you welcome it because you hypocritically use them to provide you with the political cover you need to pursue your twisted scheme. It is you, and only you, who can change direction by getting rid of them and forming a new government committed to peace, if you only will it. But you don't.

I wonder, Netanyahu, what kind of legacy do you want to leave behind? To reap the real fruits of the Six Day War is to make peace. Nothing short of peace will make the Six Day War a triumph, because the war is continuing. You, more than any other human living in Israel, will be responsible and accountable to the next generation who will be asking, why? Why must we live in a prison of our own creation when the state of Israel was created to liberate us?

History will not be kind to you, Netanyahu, unless you change course. It is time to reflect, because the destiny of the nation of Israel is in your hands.

Note: This article was originally published in the web portal of Prof. Ben-Meir and has been reproduced under arrangement. Web Link: <http://alonben-meir.com/writing/unfinished-six-day-war-open-letter-prime-minister-netanyahu/>

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