

KOL NIDRAY 5772
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My Dad started working on political campaigns in Michigan when I was only five years old and I've always been into politics. With all of its pitfalls and problems, it's extremely exciting and important. In the end, for better or worse, it is government that sets the direction for our nation.

Yet as much as I enjoy politics personally, I have always believed that it is tricky to speak politically from the bimah. I know that there are churches and some synagogues where the clergy have no problem speaking in a very overtly political manner with regard to specific candidates and political parties. However, I don't believe that mixing politics and religion from the pulpit, in this way, is generally a good idea.

For while religion can and often has influenced politics in positive ways, history is replete with examples of the harm caused when these two were mixed together too intensely. It is a tricky synthesis to get it right and, frankly, most politicians and most clergy are not chemists.

Religion is supposed to be a moral and ethical voice of conscience and I believe that most of us want our government to act morally and ethically. As such, religion and religious leaders should have a say in the discussion, however religion and religious leaders should not be the primary basis for legislative decision making. Our Constitution pretty much says that we do not want a government based on the teachings of any one religion.

America may be committed to the concept of “separation of Church and State,” however that is not true of Israel, a nation whose wonders I never tire of talking about. Israel is actually one of very few subjects upon which most American religions agree. It is also a topic which largely unites Republicans, Democrats and independents. The overwhelming consensus in America is that Israel shares our values and our principals and is one of the strongest friends that America has in the world.

For the rest of the world, however, Israel tends to be about as popular as Barack Obama at a Tea Party rally. There are so many explanations for this, but essentially it comes down to the influence of oil. Ultimately, I believe that Israel takes a beating less due to it’s policies than due to the political clout of it’s ridiculously wealthy and powerful Arab neighbors.

Israelis don’t like it, but they understand that there is a double standard at play. Syria can murder three thousand of it’s own citizens in cold blood and the world hardly protests, but Israelis bring ten mobile homes together and call it a settlement and the United Nations goes into emergency session.

Of course, the latest ballyhoo is over a Palestinian State, which really is very old news. A quick overview from the past century shows us that the British won Palestine from the Turks during World War I and then gave the United Nations the task of figuring out what to do with it when violence between Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs intensified in the 1940’s.

The United Nations adopted the King Solomon approach of splitting the baby. Neither the Jews nor the Arabs of Palestine got what they wanted, but the Jews figured that half a loaf is better than none. Foreshadowing the future, the Arab nations and the Palestinian Arabs said it was all or nothing.

And so, when the Palestinian Jews declared the independence of the State of Israel in May, 1948, it was attacked from all sides. War broke out and Muslim muftis broadcast radio messages urging the Palestinian, now Israeli Arabs, to leave the country and fight with them against the Jews.

There were isolated examples of Jewish violence against Arab civilians, which is unfortunate and a testimony to the chaos of war. Yet there is no question but that the overwhelming majority of Arabs who left did so at the urging of their own religious leadership. When Israel won, it was much more concerned with settling the Land with displaced Jewish immigrants from Arab lands than with resettling Muslim Arabs who had just tried to kill them.

The major Arab nations were about to attack Israel in June, 1967 when Israel launched a pre-emptive strike, resulting in one of the most stunning military victories in history. The Six Day War was a turning point for many reasons. David had defeated Goliath again but then, Goliath began to play the oil card and the Palestinians became the political pawns of the Arab nations for decades.

Most people believe that Yassir Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization was formed to regain the so-called "occupied territories." That is true if one understands that Arafat considered all of Israel to be occupied territory. However, the PLO was not formed to regain the West Bank, Golan Heights and Gaza Strip, as most people think. It was actually created several years before Israel won those territories in the Six Day War.

Arafat tried terrorism and succeeded in killing more Jews than anyone since Hitler. However, when he was ultimately presented with a plan which would give him 97% of the land he wanted, including a Palestinian State with a capital in Jerusalem, he left Camp David and started the violent intifada. For Arafat and for his Fatah movement, it is not and has never been about a negotiated settlement. It is all about the struggle, the jihad!

There should have been a Palestinian state created as far back in 1991. Most Israelis thought it was going to happen and were looking forward to it. Back then, Israelis considered the Palestinians to be the elite of the Arab world. Israelis felt that they could live in peace with this people, which seemed more interested in education and civilization than the rest of the Arab world.

And then came the violence, over and over again. Regardless of one's political opinion, there is no justification for targetting civilians for murder . . . none! There is no moral equivalence between civilians who are killed by return fire after military attacks are launched from hospitals, mosques and schools and targetting students in schools, civilians on buses and in restaurants.

And yet, to this day, anyone and everyone in Israel and in the Arab world who believes in the possibility of peace understands what it will essentially look like when it comes. The framework was developed twenty years ago. All that was needed was for the Palestinians to renounce violence and to agree to recognize Israel's right to live in security. You may hear talk about settlements being the obstacle to peace. They are not. Settlements are the result of the Palestinians refusing to recognize Israel's right to exist. And the longer the Palestinians refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist, the more settlements will be created.

In politics and in life, it is easy, yet irresponsible to take idealistic positions without considering the consequences of those positions becoming reality. Many political leaders have taken positions on issues which, once in office, they discover to be unrealistic.

It is easy to support no speed limits, no tolls, cutting taxes by 75% and even eliminating foreign aid. However, once one looks at the consequences of those actions, it is clear that they are impractical, if not destructive to our way of life.

Looking at the big picture is fine, but we always have to read the small print. Having done so with one of the big questions on the international agenda these days, I tell you tonight that I am in support of the creation of a Palestinian state.

I support a Palestinian state which recognizes the right of Israel to live within safe and secure borders. However, I do not support a Palestinian state which says it recognizes Israel's right to exist and then forms a political alliance with the terrorist group Hamas, whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel.

I support a Palestinian state, which is part of a two state solution. However, I do not support a two-state solution when one of those states is not Israel. When Palestinian leaders speak of two states, we assume that one of those states is Israel, as we know it today. However, that is not necessarily what they mean.

I support a Palestinian state which renounces violence, not one which is based on violence. I support a Palestinian state which comes into being as a result of an agreement with Israel. I do not support a Palestinian state which refuses to negotiate with Israel and asks the United Nations to grant the Palestinian state the legitimacy the Palestinians refuse to grant to Israel.

I support a Palestinian state whose primary focus is the welfare of Palestinians. I do not support a Palestinian state whose primary focus is the elimination of Israel.

I support a Palestinian state whose leader accepts the reality of the Holocaust. I do not support a Palestinian state whose leader wrote a doctoral thesis challenging many of the fundamental facts of the Holocaust.

I support a Palestinian state whose leadership accepts that Jews have a heritage in the Land of Israel. I do not support a Palestinian state whose leadership denies any Jewish historical connection to the Land of Israel. I do not support a Palestinian state whose leaders deny that King David, King Solomon or a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem ever existed.

I support a Palestinian state which teaches its children that Jews and Judaism are a legitimate religion and culture, alongside which they should strive to live in

peace. I do not support an anti-Semitic Palestinian state, which teaches it's children that Jews are committed to molesting, poisoning and killing Palestinian children and destroying Islam.

I support a Palestinian state which does not glorify terrorism. I do not support a Palestinian state which names streets, parks and public squares after those who murdered Jews in terrorist attacks.

I support a Palestinian state which acknowledges that if it's official religion will be Islam, then Israel is entitled to define itself as a Jewish nation.

I support a Palestinian state which allows Jews and Christians to live there in peace. I do not support a "Judenrein" Palestinian state, which will not allow Jews to be citizens, own land or to even live there.

I support a Palestinian state which does not declare that Israel must give up all lands conquered in 1967, including The Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, before it will even sit down to negotiate with Israel. I do not support a Palestinian state whose leaders demand everything before they will sit down to negotiate.

I support a Palestinian state committed to living in peace and making a final peace with Israel. I do not support a Palestinian state committed to using a peace agreement as the first step in the dismantling of Israel.

I support a Palestinian State which is serious about making peace. I do not support a Palestinian State whose leadership has already rejected an offer of 100% of the West Bank, with land swaps, Palestinian statehood, dividing Jerusalem and placing the Palestinian capital in the center of the Muslim

population of Jerusalem, in addition to giving authority for all of the city's holy sites, including the Western Wall, to an international body on which Saudi Arabia and Jordan would sit.

I support a Palestinian State committed to the concept of land for peace, not a Palestinian State committed to the concept of land without peace.

I support a Palestinian State committed to stopping the firing of rockets into Israel. I do not support a Palestinian State which violates most every promise and agreement it has ever made.

For these reasons and many more like them, I support a Palestinian State, but not the current movement for a Palestinian State led by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Everything I support about a Palestinian state does not exist and everything I reject about a Palestinian state is what currently exists.

Had the so-called ,moderate Palestinian leadership agreed to recognize Israel's right to exist and renounced terror at any point during the past twenty years, there would be a Palestinian state today. They know that, but like Yassir Arafat before him, Mahmoud Abbas has not been able to promise this because for him, it is not about peace, it is about the struggle. And should there be true peace, there would no longer be a struggle.

I hope that some day there will be a true peace between the Palestinians and the people of Israel. It makes too much sense for it not to happen eventually.

However, since 1964, the Palestinian people have been led either by terrorists or by those who glorify terrorists. Left wing and right wing Israeli prime

ministers have come and gone. While even Benjamin Netanyahu got his Likud party to accept a two-state solution, the Palestinians have still failed to produce a leader committed to making peace.

Mahmoud Abbas may be serious about wanting a Palestinian state, but he must first be serious about making peace. Mr. Abbas delights in talking about Israel as the obstacle to peace in the region. However, if he wishes to see the true obstacle to peace and to statehood for the Palestinians, Mr. Abbas needs to take an honest look at himself in the mirror, just as all of us are commanded to take honest looks at ourselves on this Yom Kippur. ~ AMEN