

By Newt Gingrich

It's Time to Bolster Peaceable Palestinians

Yasser Arafat was the personification of a faction of the Palestinian leadership which has long fomented terrorism, imposed dictatorial rule, and stolen its own people's money. Arafat's death and replacement by Mahmoud Abbas has created an opportunity for a more responsible, honest, and peaceful future. But this will require a profound transformation in Palestinian society and governance. America must make sure this transformation takes place.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has absorbed a huge amount of American attention and expenditure over the last 40 years, and it remains a drain on the American capacity to lead worldwide. A continuation of the war for another generation would undercut our efforts to stabilize Iraq, prevent a nuclear Iran, and contain North Korea. Given the increasing—and increasingly radical—Muslim population in Western Europe, continued friction in the Middle East will also destabilize European societies. Obviously, it would also be dangerous to Israel for this war to continue. And probably the biggest losers of all would be the Palestinians.

The Palestinians entered their long war with Israel as a relatively wealthy, educated, and cosmopolitan people. Today they are impoverished, without a viable economy, without a responsible government, without any visible path to a better future.

Neighboring Arab countries have done the Palestinians few favors. Those neighbors should be challenged directly today to offer citizenship to any Palestinians who have lived within their borders as refugees and wish to stay there.

The United States should also prepare to spend money and effort to help the Palestinians create a better future. We need a hard-headed carrots-and-sticks approach, which encourages the growth of a pro-peace, pro-prosperity, and pro-freedom wing of the Palestinian people.

Good Palestinians vs. bad Palestinians

We should recognize that there is a Palestinian minority that



New Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas (left), with Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon.

has only one goal: to destroy Israel. It is impossible to negotiate with this group.

Yet we must also recognize that the vast, though intimidated, majority of Palestinians would like to live peacefully. Developing a peaceful Palestinian leadership is therefore the key to any lasting solution. Instead of relying on the cheap talk of diplomacy, the U.S. should begin using intelligence assets, police capabilities, market economics, government aid, and business investment

to help the peaceful Palestinians defeat the terrorists within their borders.

As part of this, we should press the Europeans, the U.N., and various Arab governments to cut off support for the terrorist faction. If they continue to blindly support the dictatorial wing of Palestinian society, today's opportunity may disappear. But if other countries join the U.S. in insisting on Palestinian non-violence, and aiding reformist leaders, a long-elusive peace may be within reach.

The U.S. must also protect the Palestinian people's right to establish a viable state. The desire of some Israelis to grab more and more Palestinian territory should be blocked—not merely protested—by the United States. While continuing to insist on Israel's right of self-defense, including building a security fence, we should also guard against Israeli obstructionism. Our credibility depends on the world understanding that we will not support extreme territorial goals. We need to protect the weaker party in this case—the Palestinians—from the stronger power.

The United States can then play a formidable and constructive role in nurturing a democratic Palestinian nation. We must state clearly the circumstances under which we would recognize their country, establish an embassy, and sponsor Palestine

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for membership in the U.N. President Bush has already taken key steps in this direction, but the Palestinian people and their European allies need to understand that the burden of action is on the Palestinians. American recognition and support is there for the asking—if they meet clearly stipulated requirements of peacefulness, honesty, and accountability.

As a start, a successful Palestinian leadership has to be prepared to hunt down and defeat those Palestinians who would rather kill Israelis than improve the lives of their own people. The situation I am describing would resemble the Irish Free State in 1922, which realized that if it was ever to have a stable, independent country, it had to defeat the Irish Republican Army. While the might of the British Empire had been inadequate to defeat the IRA over a period of years, the new Irish Free State won the civil war in a few months.

To change the long-term climate in Palestinian society, no state-supported media should be allowed to engage in bellicose propaganda. Monitoring should be intense, and violations should elicit swift complaints and real financial consequences. Also, new systems of humanitarian aid for needy Palestinians should be developed which outperform and outreach the charities currently run by terrorist organizations.

The Palestinians themselves must be prepared to drive their corrupt leaders and bureaucrats out of power. To help them, we should shame the Europeans and the U.N. into insisting on transparency and accountability for international aid to Palestine. The incredible level of corruption in the U.N. Oil for Food program in Iraq (an estimated \$23 billion stolen from the Iraqi people under U.N. supervision) should give the U.S. the moral high ground in insisting on these reforms.

Arafat's cronies must be held accountable for the money they have stolen. We should assign forensic financial investigators to track down the assets of a lifetime of theft, and insist that the money be returned to the Palestinian people.

Put our money where our mouth is

If the newly elected Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas continues to make promising overtures, the United States should next establish a major program of economic aid for the Palestinian people—one that matches the size of the substantial aid we give to Israel. We must make sure this assistance brings clear and immediate enhancement of Palestinian life—better health care, better schools. Where necessary, our help might extend to security systems—for example, running an airport in Gaza so people could fly in and out safely. We should put our money and our personnel where our public statements are.

It will be important to establish property rights in Palestinian areas and encourage private business ownership and operations. The United States should support the creation of Palestinian free-trade and free-investment zones and provide tax credits for companies investing in joint Palestinian-Israeli ventures. Opportunities exist for a new Palestine to develop into the highest income region in the non-oil-exporting part of the Arab world.

Gaza sits just across the Mediterranean from the wealth of Europe. Its beaches are far warmer than those of Italy. The West Bank contains religious and historic sites of enormous interest to tourists. There is no inherent reason the Palestinians cannot have a future of opportunity and prosperity.

The worldwide Palestinian diaspora (many of its members remarkably successful) has an important role to play in helping the Palestinian people succeed. If they can be convinced to help their fellow Palestinians (as Jews across the world have been doing for Israel since 1948), the prospects of creating a truly prosperous Gaza and West Bank will increase dramatically. One of the real tests of the new, more responsible Palestinian system will be its ability to assure fellow Palestinians from abroad that their investments, and their persons, will be safe in their ancestral lands.

Can we afford it?

In effect, the U.S. should make the Palestinian people a straight offer: If you will help defeat terrorism and accept Israel as a neighbor, we will invest enough resources to help you become prosperous, safe, and free. We have to recognize that, in taking such actions, we are potentially igniting a Palestinian civil war between those who want their children to have a better future and those who hate Israel so much they would rather be impoverished and isolated than coexist.

No one should underestimate how violent and bitter this civil war could be. Mao Zedong wrote that one man with a rifle can control 100 unarmed villagers. The Palestinian forces of terrorism have long relied on that kind of power to dominate the decent. We have to put rifles and material assets into the hands of the responsible elements of Palestinian society so they can defeat the haters and the killers.

America has done this before. We helped Ramon Magsaysay defeat a communist insurgency in the Philippines in the late 1940s. With Britain, we helped democrats defeat left-wing guerrillas in Greece in the same period. We helped the government of El Salvador win a civil war in the 1980s. There are many other occasions where we have intervened on the side of a responsible party to help them defeat terrorists.

Can America afford such a program? If we help end the war between the Israelis and the Palestinians, we will actually *save* an extraordinary amount of money in the future—and live in a dramatically safer world. It is far cheaper to invest in winning the peace over the short run than it would be to endure continuing war in the Middle East over the long run.

When Secretary of State George Marshall proposed his plan of aid to keep Western Europe from going communist after World War II, he called for spending more than 3 percent of U.S. GDP. In today's larger economy, that would be more than \$300 billion in economic aid. An end to Israeli-Palestinian bloodshed could be cemented for a tiny fraction of that sum. And in the process we would make the world vastly safer for the American people.

