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TALKING MIDEAST PEACE

by David A. Horowitz

Two months ago most people would have dismissed talk of a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict as naive fantasy. Some still do. But stirrings at places like Portland State University, with its rich and diverse international culture, suggest that seemingly powerless people can play a part in a peace process focused half a world away.

In late November 1988 I helped create a new campus organization, PSU Friends of Israel for a Palestinian State. More than one hundred and fifty people attended our first event, a lecture by Portland rabbi and peace activist Joshua Stampfer. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the meeting was the unprecedented diversity of the audience. Listeners included supporters of Israel from the Portland community, Jewish

faculty and students, a wide array of campus activists and intellectually curious, politically committed international students, and numerous Arab and Palestinian students and faculty deeply concerned over the issue at hand.

Although his remarks brought lively debate, Rabbi Stampfer received a fair and serious hearing from the diverse crowd. A self-proclaimed Zionist and fervent supporter of Israel, the rabbi called for negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to create a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, territories which Israel's military has ruled since the end of a regional war in 1967.

Rabbi Stampfer's "two-state" solution is exactly the proposal endorsed by Friends of

Israel for a Palestinian State (FIPS). We believe that a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is essential for preservation of a stable and democratic Israel. We also support international guarantees for the security of Israel's pre-1967 borders. In short, FIPS endorses national rights of existence and security for both Palestine and Israel.

Events have moved quickly in the past two months. Pressed to respond to the power of the indigenous and largely unarmed uprising (intifada) in the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestine National Council met in Algiers to declare the creation of a Palestinian state. One month later, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat enlarged upon the Algiers agreements to explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce terrorism, and call for a negotiated and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

If there is to be a rational solution, Israel must respond with enlightened self-interest, reason and vision. So far its leaders have avoided all three. FIPS speaks for American Jews and others who support Israel but fear that policies of expansionism and military repression will ultimately destroy the experiment in Jewish statehood from within.

By overwhelming margins American Jews rally to Israel as a source of pride and as a potential haven for the Jewish people in an often hostile world. Yet as long as Israel pretend to speak for world Jewry, many are inwardly sick over the repressive responses to the Palestinian national movement. Tactics such as collective punishment, mass arrests and interrogations, deportations and selective destruction of homes and villages remind many Jews of another period of horror in another land.

PSU Friends of Israel intends to work with American Jews, Arab-Americans, and people of reason to press the United States toward a major role in the coming peace process. Such pressure will support the growing majority of Israelis who defy their leaders in public opinion polls by endorsing negotiations with the PLO.

We intend to bring speakers to the PSU campus to continue interest in this vital ingredient of a rational American Middle East policy. FIPS also will invite political and community leaders to engage in dialogue with the university community. Perhaps Portland State might stage a mock international peace conference on the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. Then we might collectively imagine what a workable settlement might actually look like.

Peace is not often a gift from heaven. Instead, it most frequently involves the will of those who decide that it has more to offer than war. Perhaps we can reason together. The alternative is to submit to those whose life meaning comes from blood feuds and past wrongs. The future of the Jewish people and the United States is tied to the aspirations of the developing world, not their destruction.

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