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## If Israel Wants Peace...

By Adil E. Shamoo

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The current right-wing government of Israel wants to negotiate with the Palestinians for their independent state as much as China wants to negotiate with Taiwan for its independent state. I have very little faith that this Israeli government will negotiate in earnest with the Palestinians. Netanyahu wants to negotiate for the sake of negotiation.

Writing in a *New York Times* op-ed, Israeli Ambassador [Michael Oren](#) bemoans how the Palestinians have not recognized Israel as a Jewish state for 62 years. For 62 years, I did not know or hear that the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state was an issue for the Palestinian to address. More importantly, everyone in the world, including the Palestinians, knows full well that Israel is a Jewish state. So the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state is, in reality, a done deal. However, no one in the world, including the United States - Israel's strongest ally - has recognized Israel as a Jewish state either. There is as much a chance of Israel becoming a non-Jewish state as Saudi Arabia becoming a non-Muslim state. Adding the Jewish-state recognition will add nothing to the security of Israel and the region, but Ambassador Oren knows that already.

Israel's right-wing governments and their neo-conservative supporters have used other excuses to postpone negotiations with the Palestinians. We remember the line that "peace in Jerusalem goes through Baghdad." More recently, it's "peace goes through Tehran" because Iran has nuclear weapons - never mind Israel has nuclear weapons and not Iran.

Yes, the Palestinian leadership outright rejected the recognition of Israel as a Jewish

state. The Palestinian Authority **countered** the Netanyahu proposal with its own clever proposal. The Palestinians would recognize Israel as a Jewish state if Israel agreed to go back to 1967 borders, freeze all settlement building, and give them East Jerusalem as their capital. This proves that both sides are intractable.

The crux of Israel's security problem is that for 62 years, Israelis enjoyed higher standards of living than Palestinians within and outside of the 1967 borders. Israel has treated the 1.5 million Israeli-Arabs as second-class citizens. Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza have lived in poverty, with a high unemployment rate, and under threat of expulsion (or have been actually expelled). Israel has beaten the Palestinians to a pulp with a 100-to-one kill ratio. The Palestinians have never given up. One would think Israel's government would have learned its lessons and looked for more peaceful alternatives.

If Israel really wants peace, why have they not negotiated a two-state solution with the most ardent peacemaker, pro-American and anti-Hamas leader – Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the president of the Palestinian Authority? If Israel really wants peace, they should deal with a man who is willing to do it. For all of his life, and especially in the last six years, President Abbas has demonstrated his willingness to be a peacemaker. He will accept any semblance of a state for Palestinians. When Abbas came to power in 2004, he immediately declared that war with Israel was over and denounced terrorism. He not only made pronouncements but followed up with actions. He fired anyone who disagreed with him. He accepted training of his security forces by the United States. During Israel's conflicts with Hamas, he used his security forces to clamp down on any pro-Hamas demonstration by West Bank residents.

If Israel wants peace, it should demonstrate good intentions by approaching Abbas with a peace agreement for the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. If Israel truly wants peace and not hegemony over the Palestinians, it should work with this known partner to set the stage for a two-state solution. U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell would do well to support such a peace agreement while negotiations for a two-state solution continue. With both peoples showing respect for each other, and with pressure from the rest of the world, greater rights for the Palestinians should become a reality. If Israel is not willing to commit itself to a peaceful resolution but rather to endless negotiations, then there will be no peace. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* called on Netanyahu to **"Just Knock It Off"** for making excuses not to negotiate in good faith.

Many documents have proposed reasonable solutions to this epic conflict, but none has been carried out on the ground. Broad parameters from the three most prominent declarations – the 2002 Arab peace initiative, the 2003 Geneva Accord, and the Roadmap -- can be applied to a West Bank agreement. The Palestinian state will have East Jerusalem as its capital. Israeli settlements will be greatly reduced, although not eliminated. The Palestinian state will be demilitarized. Palestinians in the Diaspora will be compensated with a very limited right of return. And there could be a West Bank reconstruction plan financed by the West.

The sooner Israel realizes that its future depends on its acceptance by its neighbors, regardless of how Israelis refer to their state or their power, the sooner peace will prevail. Otherwise, wars and conflicts will continue. Palestinians will continue to suffer, and Israel will become ever more dangerously isolated.