

MEMMO

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Bold Steps by Arab States Needed to End Conflict

President Obama's address tomorrow to the Arab and Muslim world is an important opportunity to break the psychology of conflict that has permeated the Middle East. As the president seeks areas for partnership with Arab states, those nations can reciprocate by taking immediate transformative steps to support U.S. peace efforts. For example, Arab states should reinforce their Arab Peace Initiative with tangible steps demonstrating real interest in ending six decades of isolating and delegitimizing Israel. They should study how Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 dramatically altered Israel's perception of Egypt and led to Egyptian-Israeli peace that has lasted for more than three decades.

Obama's outreach to the Arab world presents a real opportunity for the Arab states to show they are prepared to end the conflict with Israel.

- Arab leaders must understand that continuing their efforts to delegitimize Israel at the U.N. and other international fora, their political, economic and cultural boycott of Israel, and their state-run anti-Israel propaganda campaigns will scuttle the culture of peace the president is trying to foster.
- The Arab states should look toward history for examples of how to change the conflict. Before Sadat made his historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977, most Israelis were opposed to withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, which provided an enormous security buffer.
- After the transformative visit, Israelis backed Prime Minister Menachem Begin's forward-leaning decision to withdraw from the entire Sinai and remove settlements as part of the peace treaty with Egypt.
- The peace treaty between Israel and Jordan was similarly based on mutual respect and outreach and the genuine acceptance of Israel's right to exist by King Hussein.
- Israeli leaders say that similar efforts today by Arab leaders to reach out to Israel would be an important step. Israeli President Shimon Peres said in a recent speech in Washington that he hopes the Arab Peace Initiative "will be translated in real action, the sooner the better."
- While the Arab states have proposed to establish normal relations with Israel as part of the Arab Peace Initiative, they have eschewed concrete steps until Israel fulfills all their demands. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia warned earlier this year that the Arab offer would not be good forever, and that Israel could face more violence if it did not accept the offer.



Arab states must take bold steps to foster peace with Israel, such as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's (center) visit to Jerusalem in 1977.

There are a number of bold and immediate steps the Arab states can take to show a true commitment to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict.

- As U.S. special Middle East envoy George Mitchell has said, the Arab states should take initial confidence-building measures such as granting overflight rights to Israeli civilian aircraft.
- While steps such as overflights are incremental, to make fundamental changes in the region Arab leaders should follow Sadat's example by taking transformative actions, such as visiting Israel.
- The Arab states should move toward recognition of Israel and public meetings with Israeli officials to tackle the full range of issues now separating Israel and the Arab world.
- The Arab states should terminate the Arab League boycott of Israel, establish trade relations and cultural exchanges, and establish postal and telecommunications lines.
- The Arab states can go a long way in supporting peace efforts by opening their societies to Israelis, including inviting Israelis to participate in educational programs and sporting events.
- The Arab states should clamp down on all support for terrorist groups and end the routine anti-Israel and anti-Semitic incitement in their media and educational systems.

President Obama and other top administration officials have called on the Arab states to increase their efforts to support Middle East peace efforts.

- President Obama, during his recent meeting with Israel's prime minister, called on Arab countries "to be more supportive and be bolder in seeking potential normalization with Israel."
- Vice President Joe Biden said the administration is looking for tangible steps from the Arab states. "Now is the time for Arab states to make meaningful gestures to show the Israeli leadership and the people that the promise of ending Israel's isolation in the region is real and genuine," he said in his recent address to the recent AIPAC Policy Conference. "They must take action now."
- In addition to urging the Arab states to take positive steps toward Israel, Obama also has said they need to work to bolster the Palestinian Authority over Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups.
- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized the need for all parties to take steps for peace, saying that "... it's not only ... what the Israelis and the Palestinians will do; but what will the Arab neighbors do; what will others do, to help us bring about the conclusion we seek."

Unfortunately, the actions of many Arab states signal that they are not ready to back the peace process and normalize relations with Israel.

- Rather than take steps to normalize relations with Israel, the Organization of the Islamic Conference condemned Israel as "racist," defended terrorist organizations and called for additional economic boycotts at their conference at the end of May.
- At the Doha summit in April, the Arab League praised Hamas terrorism against Israel, saying, "We send greetings of pride and admiration to the Palestinian people's valiant resistance against the treacherous Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip. We stress the need to support their steadfastness and resistance against this aggression."
- Qatar, which hosted the Doha summit, and Mauritania severed ties with Israel earlier this year. Qatar also provides millions of dollars to Hamas each month, a move that directly undercuts Abbas' PA and Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts.
- Arab states have failed to provide the Palestinian leadership in the West bank with the financial support necessary to bolster the Palestinian economy and the political backing that will be needed to reach an agreement with Israel.