Israel's 60-Year Quest for Peace

Throughout its history, the State of Israel has sought to live side-by-side in peace with all of its neighbors.

In fact, even before Israel was established, the leaders of the Jewish community in then-British Mandate Palestine sought peace with their Arab neighbors. In 1947, the Jewish community of Palestine accepted the partition plan approved by the U.N. that would create a Jewish state alongside an Arab state, even though the Jewish state it envisioned was truncated, non-contiguous and without Jerusalem. The Arab states rejected the resolution, invading Israel in 1948 with the purpose of destroying the newborn state.

In 1967, after successfully defending itself in the Six-Day War, Israel offered to return captured territories in return for peace treaties. Egypt, Syria, and the rest of the Arab League countries rejected the offer. It would take 11 more years for Egypt to finally agree to a deal whereby Israel returned the entire Sinai Peninsula in exchange for a peace agreement – the first such treaty between Israel and an Arab country.

In 1993, Israel granted the Palestinians unprecedented authority over Gaza and parts of the West Bank, and commenced negotiations designed to end the conflict in exchange for Palestinian recognition of Israel and an end to terrorism. The next year Jordanian King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin signed a peace treaty. Jordan became the second Arab state to formally come to terms with Israel.

In 2000, following talks at Camp David, Yasser Arafat rejected Israel's peace offer and the Palestinians launched sustained terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, Israel accepted President Clinton's proposals for a final peace with the Palestinians and agreed to cede all of Gaza, 96% of the West Bank, territory from within pre-1967 Israel, and parts of eastern Jerusalem. Arafat rejected these proposals as well. That same year, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Lebanon, only to be met with a massive military buildup by the terrorist army Hizballah which regularly fired rockets into Israel and launched a war in 2006 by killing three IDF soldiers on Israeli territory, and abducting and subsequently killing two others.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, providing the Palestinians with an unprecedented chance to prove their intention to fight terrorism and govern effectively. Unfortunately, the step was met by thousands of rockets and mortars fired from Hamas-controlled Gaza.

And earlier this year, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu formally endorsed the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state, called on the Palestinians to recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people, and called for the immediate resumption of negotiations without preconditions. Netanyahu has ordered the removal of dozens of roadblocks and checkpoints, curbed Israeli security incursions and taken unprecedented steps to bolster the Palestinian economy, all in an effort to demonstrate Israel's desire for peace with the Palestinians. Yet the Palestinians, as so many times before, have failed to reciprocate; the Palestinian Authority has resisted even beginning negotiations with the Jewish state.

Throughout its history Israel has consistently reached out and taken bold steps to end the conflict with its neighbors. While most of the initiatives undertaken during Israel's 60-year quest for peace have been rebuffed, when a committed partner comes along, Israel has repeatedly proven that its open hand remains outstretched, and that true peace is possible.