



Rabbi Weiner's Jan. 2009 Bulletin Article

It seems like everyone is vying for the attention of President-elect Obama. The auto industry, the mortgage industry, foreign leaders, to name a few are reaching out to his transition team to push their goals and agendas to the top of his administration's priorities. The list is endless. Those who benefited from the Bush Administration seek to maintain policies that benefited them. Those whose agendas suffered during the Bush Administration will of course will seek to make up for lost time. It will be interesting to see the winners and losers in this race for President elect Obama's attention. These are tough times, and priorities will need to be set. Our nation eagerly waits to see what they will be.

One group in the mix that I am particularly concerned about that is the *National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East*. This august group, comprised of leading Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders recently (December 4th) wrote to President elect Obama to congratulate him on his election and asked him to continue the practice established during the Bush Administration of regular meetings between the Secretary of State and this organization. Their letter also urged concerted US leadership in the Middle East, and making Middle East peace a priority.

Who could disagree with that? Yet that innocent sounding letter is far more politically charged and is far more fraught with danger than one might expect. As always, the devil is in the details and it is obvious to me at least that all the signatories to the letter are not working toward common goals. What is the message that is actually being delivered to Mr. Obama?

A similar statement was publicly issued after a meeting this organization held on November 21st with under secretary of state William Burns. The statement contained remarks by Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (which by the way is an outstanding organization that all the movements, Reform, Conservative and Orthodox cooperate with on public policy issues), Reverend Leighton Ford, and Dr. Sayyid Syeed, the National Director of the Islamic Society of North America. It is his statement that should make all supporters of Israel, left wing, right wing, or centrist, stop dead in their tracks. He noted that, "...the Arab peace initiative led by Saudi Arabia offers the promise of negotiation to achieve comprehensive, conclusive, Arab – Israeli peace."

Now wait a minute. We have, since 1993, at least 5 major agreements between Israel and the representative of the Palestinians. We have the Oslo Accords, the Hebron Accords, the Wye Accord, the road map for peace, and most recently the Summit at Annapolis last year. Each of these has been entered into and agreed to by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The Saudi Initiative is a Johnny-come-lately attempt by the Saudis and the Arab League to influence the negotiations and pressure Israel without actually participating and dealing with Israel face to face. It demands a return to pre-1967 borders, the "Right of Return" of Palestinian refugees (based on UN resolution 194 which also calls for placing broad swaths of Jerusalem under UN administration) to return not only to an envisioned Palestinian state, but Israel as well. And then if Israel commits to these demands, there can be discussions of eventual Arab recognition of Israel.

Now if this isn't bad enough I wish to remind you that where as this might seem reasonable to the National Leadership Initiative, the Saudi initiative has been endorsed only by the most left wing of the pro-Israel community, enjoys virtually no support in Israel, and has been rejected categorically by the government of Israel who insists on face to face negotiations, based on previously signed agreements. The Saudi Initiative? Is this the message, is this the hope that we want to share with the new Administration? G-d forbid!

It is bad enough that there are Jewish leaders, even great ones like Rabbi David Saperstein who have lent their names and prestige to this nonsense. But it will be even worse if these ideas are the ones that dominate the foreign policy of the American future. Do we really want peace and to improve America's standing in that difficult part of the world? If so, let us share a different message with the new Administration: there must be one law and one standard for all, and not a continuation of the previous way of doing business, with one standard for all, and a different one for Israel. Let American policy demand that each party adhere strictly to previously signed agreements and put the full weight of our prestige and strength in that direction. If the new administration can do that, I am quite sure that the peace that we all dream of will be achieved that much closer.



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