



## **Rabbi Weiner's Nov. 2007 Bulletin Article**

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, I spoke to the congregation about some of the challenges that Israel would face during this special year marking 60 years of independence. One of the points that I tried to make was how our different visions of Zionism, and our different visions of our responsibilities toward Israel could potentially undercut our communal ability to advocate successfully for Israel, especially given the current political situation in the Middle East. I used the example of the upcoming U.S. peace conference that will be sponsored by the Bush Administration in November. On Rosh Hashanah, this peace summit seemed far off. But by the time this edition of the bulletin reaches you, it will be but weeks away.

Like any supporter of Israel, I pray for peace and look forward to the day when Israel and its neighbors enjoy good relations, free trade, open borders and mutual respect. Yet I am not optimistic about the upcoming peace conference. If past history can predict the future, the failure of the summit will not bode well for Israel. Each day in the Israeli press we see the abandonment of the principle of negotiations without preconditions, allowing the Palestinians to make unreasonable demands before the negotiations even begin, and then declare any and all negotiations a failure when Israel quite correctly rejects those very demands. So for example, this week's news tells of Palestinian demands for a declaration of principles outlining major areas of agreement on deeply divisive issues such as a right of return for Palestinian displaced during Israel's war of Independence, as well as a timetable for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Israel however, prefers to leave these discussions for face to face negotiations as well as present demands of its own. Despite these vast differences before the conference has even begun, those same media outlets report veiled threats on the part of the Palestinian negotiating team that failure to make progress on the very principles (which again Israel has not yet agreed to) would result another uprising by the Palestinians. Our State Department is scrambling to bridge the gaps between these positions, ignoring the fact that these differences have existed for 60 years and they will not be settled by well intentioned diplomatic efforts by our State Department, no matter how strenuous. We certainly appreciate the support that the Bush Administration has extended to Israel. But I am concerned about not only what I predict will be a diplomatic failure, but the consequences that this failure will have for Israel. There will be no major breakthrough, no new Camp David style agreement or Oslo accords. The leadership isn't there. The pre conference diplomacy has been unsuccessful.

And with good reason, the Israeli public remains deeply distrustful of the Palestinian leadership, as should we.

As mixed signals emanate from the Israeli government as to what its position will be, various pro Israel groups are already staking their claim. “Pro peace” organizations are touting statements that seem to suggest large scale Israeli withdrawals from significant portions of Judea and Samaria. In response, a new coalition of pro Israel groups has emerged that opposes withdrawal from Jerusalem and other strategic areas. And while this may seem reasonable to some, it confirms the bitter truth that Israel’s deep divisions are mirrored in our community as well.

Now ordinarily I would not be particularly concerned with such divisions. After all, our Rabbis pointed out thousands of years ago that it is human nature to disagree about important things. But as we prepare to celebrate this milestone in Jewish history, I want to remind each of our members that these are not ordinary times. Israel simply cannot make mistakes with regard to its future, despite whatever pressure may be exerted on it from the outside. And when it comes to providing the type of support that will help Israel stand firm against such pressure that potentially jeopardizes its security, we cannot make mistakes either.



**Jewish Community Center of Paramus**  
E. 304 Midland Ave., Paramus NJ 07652  
Phone: (201) 262-7691 Fax: (201) 262-6516  
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