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Op-Ed

NEEDED: A MANIFESTO FOR MIDEAST PEACE

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ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES ARE ON THE BRINK OF AN ALL- OUT WAR WITH DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THESE TWO TRAUMATIZED NATIONS. The Israeli government and the Palestinian street are controlled by elements that see such a war as an opportunity to achieve their maximalist goals. Under the circumstances, there is a compelling need for vigorous intervention by outside powers - the Arab League, the European Union, the United Nations, and, perhaps most important, the United States - to pull the parties away from the brink and back to the negotiating table.

Outside intervention, however, cannot by itself restore the working trust required for negotiating an agreement conducive to the stable peace and mutually enhancing relationship between the two nations on which their survival in the small land they share ultimately depends. To succeed, the outside intervention must be accompanied by creative, courageous acts of leadership emanating from the two societies themselves.

The most likely candidates to perform such leadership roles are the two surviving members of the triad that received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994: Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Both men have suffered losses in power and prestige. Both have been criticized for their roles in legitimizing the extremes of violence in their respective communities.

And yet they are probably the only leaders with the authority and the domestic and international standing to take the initiative proposed here.

The scenario I envisage calls for a meeting or a series of meetings between the two men (and a small number of close advisers) in Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah. Refusal by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to authorize such an initiative would provide the appropriate moment for Peres to resign from the government. He would be resigning in pursuit of an initiative with the potential for achieving a dramatic breakthrough.

The meetings between the two leaders would aim to produce a joint manifesto with the following components:

First, a call for an end to the violence and for the resumption of negotiations designed to achieve a just solution to the conflict, addressing the fundamental needs of both parties.

Second, a commitment to the final outcome of the negotiations: an agreement that would end the conflict on the basis of a historic compromise in the form of a two-state solution.

Third, a delineation of the broad outlines of the historic compromise, including: establishment of a viable, independent, and sovereign Palestinian state consisting of the West Bank and Gaza, with contiguous territory within each of these two units and safe passage between them; acceptance of the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish-majority state with the proviso that it assure full democratic rights for its Arab minority; designation of Jerusalem, including the Old City and the holy sites, as a shared city, containing the capitals of both states; and development of a comprehensive, multifaceted solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, including resettlement and compensation, which would satisfy Palestinians' sense of justice and Israelis' concern about the stability of their state.

Fourth, a specification of the issues that remain to be negotiated within the framework of the historic compromise, such as border adjustments and territorial exchange, arrangements for governance and security of a shared Jerusalem, and procedures for addressing both the symbolic and the practical aspects of a solution for the refugee problem.

Finally, an unambiguous and honest account of the costs that a historic compromise would entail for both peoples, stressing, in particular, the need to recognize that Israeli dreams of settling Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, and Palestinian dreams of returning in large numbers to the homes they lost in 1948 cannot be realized.

A manifesto along these lines would demonstrate to the Israeli and Palestinian publics that there are courageous leaders who are prepared to commit themselves to a historic compromise and honestly spell out its implications. It would help revive the belief in each community that there is a credible negotiating partner on the other side and that there is a mutually acceptable formula for a final agreement.

The manifesto would gain symbolic strength if Arafat and Peres dedicated it to the memory of their fellow Nobel laureate, Yitzhak Rabin, who paid with his life for the pursuit of a historic compromise and whose assassination was a major contributing factor to deterioration of the peace process.

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