

Letter to President Bush on Israel, Arafat and the War on Terrorism

April 3, 2002

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We write to thank you for your courageous leadership in the war on terrorism and to offer our full support as you continue to protect the security and well-being of Americans and all freedom-loving peoples around the world.

In particular, we want to commend you for your strong stance in support of the Israeli government as it engages in the present campaign to fight terrorism. As a liberal democracy under repeated attack by murderers who target civilians, Israel now needs and deserves steadfast support. This support, moreover, is essential to Israel's continued survival as a free and democratic nation, for only the United States has the power and influence to provide meaningful assistance to our besieged ally. And with the memory of the terrorist attack of September 11 still seared in our minds and hearts, we Americans ought to be especially eager to show our solidarity in word and deed with a fellow victim of terrorist violence.

No one should doubt that the United States and Israel share a common enemy. We are both targets of what you have correctly called an "Axis of Evil." Israel is targeted in part because it is our friend, and in part because it is an island of liberal, democratic principles -- American principles -- in a sea of tyranny, intolerance, and hatred. As Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has pointed out, Iran, Iraq, and Syria are all engaged in "inspiring and financing a culture of political murder and suicide bombing" against Israel, just as they have aided campaigns of terrorism against the United States over the past two decades. You have declared war on international terrorism, Mr. President. Israel is fighting the same war.

This central truth has important implications for any Middle East peace process. For one spoke of the terrorist network consists of Yasser Arafat and the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. Although your critics in the United States, Europe and the Arab world suggest that you and your administration bear some responsibility for the lack of political progress between Israel and the Palestinians, they are mistaken. As Secretary of State Powell recently stated, the present crisis stems not from "the absence of a political way forward" but from "terrorism..., terrorism in its rawest form." That terrorism has been aided, abetted, harbored, and in many instances directed by Mr. Arafat and his top lieutenants. Mr. Arafat has demonstrated time and again that he cannot be part of the peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He demonstrated it in July 2000, when he rejected the most generous Israeli peace offer in history; he demonstrated it in September 2000, when he launched the new intifada against Israel; and he demonstrated it again these past two weeks when, despite the hand you offered him through Vice President Cheney, he gave sanction to some of the worst terrorist violence against Israeli citizens.

It is true that the United States has a leading role to play in the Middle East and, potentially, in resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. But it is critical that negotiations not be the product of terrorism or conducted under the threat of terrorist attack. This would send a most dangerous signal to our adversaries that civilized states do not have the necessary courage to fight terrorism in all its forms.

Mr. President, it can no longer be the policy of the United States to urge, much less to pressure, Israel to continue negotiating with Arafat, any more than we would be willing to be pressured to negotiate with Osama Bin Laden or Mullah Omar. Nor should the United States provide financial support to a Palestinian Authority that acts as a cog in the machine of Middle East terrorism, any more than we would approve of others providing assistance to Al Qaeda.

Instead, the United States should lend its full support to Israel as it seeks to root out the terrorist network

that daily threatens the lives of Israeli citizens. Like our own efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere, Israel's task will not be easy. It will not be accomplished quickly or painlessly. But with fortitude, on our part as well on the part of the Israeli people, it can succeed in significantly reducing the risk of future terrorist attacks against Israel and against us. And, in so doing, we will give the Palestinian people a chance they have so far not had under Arafat's rule -- an opportunity to construct a political culture and government that do not marry their national and religious aspirations with suicide bombers.

Furthermore, Mr. President, we urge you to accelerate plans for removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. As you have said, every day that Saddam Hussein remains in power brings closer the day when terrorists will have not just airplanes with which to attack us, but chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, as well. It is now common knowledge that Saddam, along with Iran, is a funder and supporter of terrorism against Israel. Iraq has harbored terrorists such as Abu Nidal in the past, and it maintains links to the Al Qaeda network. If we do not move against Saddam Hussein and his regime, the damage our Israeli friends and we have suffered until now may someday appear but a prelude to much greater horrors. Moreover, we believe that the surest path to peace in the Middle East lies not through the appeasement of Saddam and other local tyrants, but through a renewed commitment on our part, as you suggested in your State of the Union address, to the birth of freedom and democratic government in the Islamic world.

Mr. President, in that address, you put forth a most compelling vision of a world at peace, free from the threat of terrorism, where freedom flourishes. The strength of that vision lies in its moral clarity and consistency. In the war on terrorism, we cannot condemn some terrorists while claiming that other terrorists are potential partners for peace. We cannot help some allies under siege, while urging others to compromise their fundamental security. As you eloquently stated: "Our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today."

Israel's fight against terrorism is our fight. Israel's victory is an important part of our victory. For reasons both moral and strategic, we need to stand with Israel in its fight against terrorism.

Sincerely,

[William Kristol](#)

[Ken Adelman](#) [Gary Bauer](#) [Jeffrey Bell](#) [William J. Bennett](#)

[Ellen Bork](#) [Linda Chavez](#) [Eliot Cohen](#) [Midge Decter](#)

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