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Youth Factor: The Missing Element in the Middle East Peace Process

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http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tala-haikal/youth-factor-the-missing-_b_5064632.ht... [1]

Youth Factor: The Missing Element in the Middle East Peace Process

When my parents were my age, most people considered peace between Israel and Palestine unthinkable. But for me, a 21-year-old Palestinian/Lebanese-American woman, peace is not a bizarre idea at all. Instead it is a cliché, a commonplace; indeed, so much that it almost seems passé. But it can't be.

Yala, this is the time for peace between Israel and Palestine. The status quo is not sustainable. It is dangerous for everybody. Young Palestinians, Israelis, Arab-Americans, Jewish-Americans and others need to become leaders and find our own formulas for helping to achieve peace.

Being young comes with enthusiasm, but our idealism must be channeled into real solutions rather than unrealizable dreams. Many people my age confuse thinking outside of the box with thinking inside an alternate reality. Instead of fantasies, if we want to make a difference, we should focus on what is achievable rather than what is emotionally satisfying. Those who say "our vision need not be bounded by what currently seems totally unrealistic" are using that argument as an excuse for not being serious.

Many of our parents and grandparents are stuck in their worldviews. It's understandable. They grew up in the shadows of past wars. Our generation has come of age during a time when a two state solution was almost universally accepted as the only rational outcome. Ironically, the major problem facing us now is not the novelty, but the staleness, of the idea of peace between Israel and Palestine. We need to treat peace as an idea that is still fresh, or at least that can be refreshed.

We are the first generation for whom peace has been a normative expectation. Yet, many of us have come to believe such a peace is unachievable. After all, negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have been going on since before many of us were born. Yet there has been

no end to the conflict or to the occupation, and there is no end in sight either.

However, that does not mean that the formula of a two state solution has become invalid. On the contrary, it remains the only way to actually end the occupation and the conflict. All other ideas, proposals, visions and plans are either completely unworkable or would merely continue the conflict in some altered context. Nothing else can end it.

The major challenge facing our forebears was to imagine peace when it seemed unthinkable. But the challenge we have inherited from them is to continue to work for peace when it seems unattainable.

Of course a permanent peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians is ultimately a political matter for national leaderships. However, dramatic changes can occur at the grassroots level. Positive change happens just as easily, and is just as necessary, from the bottom-up as the top-down. The least we can do together is cultivate a culture of peace.

At the [American Task Force on Palestine](#) [2], where I have been working for the past year, we have created a strong working relationship--called "Peace Partners" with the Jewish-American group, [Americans for Peace Now](#) [3]. Our message is to demonstrate that Arab-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Palestinians and Israelis can all be partners for peace. We are actively building constructive and cooperative relations with Jewish-American groups and all others across the political spectrum that are interested in a two-state solution. What we need is the broadest support base for peace possible.

We believe young people need to take a lead in building this strong coalition for peace. First, we need to find each other. Then we need to establish not just dialogue, but cooperative relations. And to do that we need to understand and respect, although not adopt, each other's narratives. Obviously, there are major differences and much we won't agree about. But we have a mutual stake, for very different reasons, in the same outcome: a two-state solution.

If we work together, a world of possibilities opens. There are innumerable ways we can mobilize for peace. Social media, grassroots activism, public education, pressuring politicians and speaking and writing are only some of the most obvious approaches. But the main purpose should be tapping into the energy and imagination of young people committed to peace in order to discover exciting, unexpected and original approaches.

The most important thing is that these ideas are just the beginning of what is possible. What's really needed is for each and every one of us that prefers a future of peace over conflict to contribute our own individual or collective initiatives to help that make happen. It's up to me. It's up to you. And it's up to all of us together.

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