



Editorial: I Stand with Israel

By Reverend Raphael Warnock

I was born in Georgia, raised in Savannah, and for the past 15 years have served as the Senior Pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Leading from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic pulpit, I am proud to continue his legacy of leadership and friendship between the Black and Jewish communities of Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1958, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple was bombed following Rabbi Jacob Rothschild's outspoken support for the Civil Rights movement and Dr. King. This twisted act of violence had the unintended consequence of strengthening the camaraderie not only between the two men, but also binding two communities of faith.

Rabbi Rothschild and Dr. King understood then what I know to be true today: our communities face threats that are part of the same sickness of bigotry and hatred and we need each other to defeat them.

More than 60 years later, I continue in that tradition of interfaith understanding and respect, working with Rabbi Peter Berg and other leaders of our Jewish community in Atlanta on joint services and fellowship in recognition of our shared values.

As a candidate for the U.S. Senate, many are still learning of my background and my interfaith commitment to the world around us, and in particular to the Jewish community and to Israel. Unfortunately, my opponent is already misrepresenting my views for political gain.

That's why I believe it's critical the community hear directly from me.

I wholeheartedly and unabashedly echo Dr. King's declaration that "Israel's right to exist as a state in security is incontestable."

Claims that I believe Israel is an apartheid state are patently false -- I do not believe that.

I pray for the day that military assistance and arms are no longer needed anywhere in the world, but I understand the critical nature of our current partnership to Israel. That is why I support President Obama's security assistance memorandum of understanding that protects Israel, and I agree with President-Elect Biden that placing conditions on our assistance would be a mistake.

In the spirit of John Lewis and so many civil rights heroes I revere, I recognize the First Amendment right to protest is an American value we must protect. But I strongly oppose the BDS movement and its anti-Semitic underpinnings, including its supporters' refusal to acknowledge Israel's right to exist.

I understand and recognize Israel's unique historical importance as the greatest proponent of democracy in the Middle East and America's most important partner in the region. I understand the many threats that face Israel and as a U.S. Senator I will work to ensure Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon.

It is true that I am deeply concerned about continued settlement expansion – I believe it is a threat to the prospect of a two- state solution, which I believe is the only path to enduring peace. I will continue to advocate for self-determination for the Palestinian people because I want to see a Palestinian state living side by side with a safe and secure Israel.

In my final year of seminary, I wrote a master's thesis on two of my favorite theologians: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Of course, Dr. King was the central figure and most prominent voice of the civil rights movement in its fight against segregation while Bonhoeffer was an important leader in the small, minority voice of Christian resistance to Hitler, The Third Reich and "Christian" Aryanism in Germany.

Both were pastors operating in the public square, confronting anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry in their contexts and calling upon their congregation and their country to create a more loving, peaceful and just society.

King said, "We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Bonhoeffer averred, "We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated — in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."

Their moral legacy has informed my activism, the coalitions of conscience that I have strived to create, and the work that I do.

Without reservation, you can count on me to stand with the Jewish community and Israel in the U.S. Senate.



Reverend Raphael Warnock For U.S. Senate Policy Paper on the unique U.S.-Israeli Friendship

In my final year of seminary, in fulfillment of the requirements for graduation, I wrote a Master's Thesis on two of my favorite theologians: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Of course, Martin Luther King, Jr. was the central figure and most prominent voice of the civil rights movement in its fight against segregation in the United States while Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an important leader in the small, minority voice of Christian resistance to Hitler, The Third Reich and "Christian" Aryanism in Germany. Both were pastors operating in the public square, confronting anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry in their contexts and calling upon their congregation and their country to create a more loving, peaceful and just society.

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That is why as the Senior Pastor of Dr. King's church, I am proud to continue his legacy of leadership and friendship between the Black and Jewish communities of Atlanta, Georgia. In 1958, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple on Peachtree Street was bombed following Rabbi Rothschild's outspoken support for the Civil Rights movement and Dr. King. This twisted act of violence had the unintended consequence of strengthening the camaraderie not only between two men, but also binding two communities of faith.

More than 60 years later, I strive to continue in the tradition of interfaith understanding and respect, working with Rabbi Peter Berg and other leaders of our Jewish community on joint services and fellowship in recognition of our shared values and commitment to justice. Our respective histories of oppression and our shared perspective against bigotry, racism, and xenophobia unite us, and guide me personally in my embrace of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s declaration that "**Israel's right to exist as a state in security is incontestable.**"¹

¹ <https://www.jta.org/1967/10/11/archive/dr-king-repudiates-anti-semitic-anti-israel-black-power-stand>

I understand and recognize Israel's unique historical importance as the greatest proponent of democracy in the Middle East and America's most important ally in the region. Because that strategic relationship transcends partisan politics, I am proud to stand in the rich tradition of Georgia leaders like Sen. Johnny Isakson and Congressman John Lewis in my steadfast commitment to Israel and the Jewish people, and in the U.S. Senate I will be a staunch advocate against anti-Semitism in all its forms.

The U.S.-Israel Friendship is Crucial to Georgia and the World

Beyond the U.S.-Israel shared interests of security is a meaningful partnership that furthers our two countries' economic interests. For Georgians, this international relationship strengthens our local economy. Dating back to Governor Zell Miller, we established the Georgia-Israel Exchange to "explore emerging technology, enhance trade, encourage tourism and jointly participate in economic development programs."² Since 1994, Georgia has had a continuous economic development presence in Israel, helping in part to grow trade in excess of more than \$800 million between our two nations last year.³ This special relationship has a practical meaning to the more than 1,000 Georgians employed at more than 20 Israeli facilities across the state.⁴

Working with our allies, we are building a better world right here in Georgia. Under the "Binational Agricultural Research and Development Fund" (BARD), millions worth of research grants have been designated to Georgians in pursuit of agriculture R&D around the world. Right now, the University of Georgia is working hand-in-hand with partners in Israel on projects to strengthen our peanut crops and to develop "dynamic irrigation management"⁵ to better use the scarcity of our natural resources in a world under threat by climate change.⁶

Israel's outsized role in Georgia has also had a historical impact on our state. In conjunction with Georgia Power, Israeli solar company Energiya developed and built Georgia's first commercial-scale solar field in Southeastern Glynn County, adding 22.5 megawatts of electricity to our grid.⁷ Our partnership is building a cleaner, more sustainable energy future for the people of Georgia.

² <https://www.georgia.org/sites/default/files/wp-uploads/2013/09/Georgia-IsraelConnection-FINAL1.pdf>

³ https://www.georgia.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/georgia_israel_connection_2020.pdf

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ https://www.mdpi.com/journal/remotesensing/special_issue_flyer_pdf/water_stress/web

⁶ See BARD projects "Using remote sensing to develop dynamic irrigation management zones" and "The molecular dissection of the crop maturation trait in peanuts"

⁷ <https://www.ipost.com/israel-news/israel-to-light-up-georgia-with-states-first-solar-field-455804>

Israel's Security

All of this economic exchange and the prosperity it creates for families here and in Israel pre-supposes Israel's security. That is among the reasons why I support President Obama's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), providing the "largest single" pledge of military support in U.S. history.⁸ While I pray for the day that military assistance and arms are no longer needed anywhere in the world, I understand the critical nature of our current partnership to world security and our economy. I also understand that the MOU's military assistance is critical to the preservation of life for so many throughout Israel. By supporting the "Iron Dome" missile defense system, the U.S. has helped protect human life and decrease the threat to the public of the estimated 150,000 rockets throughout the region.⁹

As a U.S. Senator, I will support and build upon the strong friendship that has benefited the United States, Georgia, and Israel. I subscribe to the belief that this partnership has advanced our local economy, international security, and Israel. As a Senator, I will support the MOU and also do everything I can to further our shared economic and security interests well into the future.

Path to Peace and a Two-State Solution

For the sake of the United States, Israel, the Palestinian people, and the world, we must do all that we can to promote a long-standing peace that protects the security of all. I am convinced that bilateral negotiations, with the aim of a two-state solution, are our best approach for success. Any solution must be rooted in the protection and security of Israel's borders, its identity as a Jewish, democratic state, a dedication to establishing Jerusalem as a shared capital, and a commitment to improving the quality of life for both the Jewish and Palestinian people.

Eleven minutes after the formation of the Jewish State, President Truman was the first international leader to recognize Israel. From Israel's inception, the U.S. has played a critical role in being a fair arbiter in the region. I believe our critical role continues today, and we must continue to provide support to the region and increase aid to the Palestinian people to benefit mutual security and improve economic conditions. Our involvement in the peace process is critical to the promotion of democracy and to break the logjam to peace.

⁸ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/14/fact-sheet-memorandum-understanding-reached-israel>

⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/israel-s-shadow-war-iran-risks-triggering-wider-conflict-analysts-n1046236>

Being a true friend also means being a truth-teller who does not shy away from hard conversations. I am a true friend to Israel, which is why I know how important it is to express my strong reservations and concerns over settlement expansion and creeping annexation that ultimately impede our hopes for peace. The annexation process undermines our ability to negotiate in good faith for a permanent two-state solution to peace, which is why I oppose unilateral annexation. Being a friend to both Israel and the Palestinian people requires our leaders to be honest and vocal brokers.

In order to guarantee a long-standing peace that protects the security of the Israeli and Palestinian people, we must do everything we can to preserve bargaining power in the peace process. Long-term institutional change is painful and hard, but with courage, I know we can find a way to peace that protects us all.

Opposition to BDS and Delegitimizing Israel

In the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr., I recognize the First Amendment right to protest is an American value and a constitutional right - one that I have embraced time and time again from my arrests at the Georgia Governor's Office while promoting Medicaid expansion to the steps of the U.S. Capitol opposing a bankrupt, immoral budget. Like Representatives John Lewis and Ayanna Pressley, I could be counted on in the U.S. Senate to be a vocal supporter of the right to protest.

However, as a friend of Israel, I firmly oppose the global BDS movement, its anti-Semitic overtones and its refusal to acknowledge Israel's right to exist. While I am deeply concerned about injustices impacting the Palestinian people, I do not believe BDS is the solution to improving the quality of life for all in the Middle East. As a truth-teller, I know that no singular country's actions are perfect, including Israel's – and yet the country is a true friend and our strong, democratic ally in the region.

By putting all of our efforts behind promoting a long-standing peace in the Middle East, I believe we can improve quality of life across the region for all.

The Threat of a Nuclear Iran and Destabilizing Third-Party Actors

I am very concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially to regimes that have articulated open hostility not only to the United States, but also to any varied groups across the world. The people of Iran are good and just; however, we have seen time and again the real threat and regional instability posed by Iranian leadership. In addition to aggression against the U.S., their leaders have threatened that Israel must be “wiped off the map.”¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/27/world/africa/wipe-israel-off-the-map-iranian-says.html>

Now more than ever, we must reaffirm not only our commitment to Israel, but also a commitment to a long-term strategy to combatting those intent on regional destabilization throughout the Middle East. And in the absence of leadership from Washington, our efforts to ensure Iran never obtains nuclear weapons are even more dire.

Iran's belligerency encompasses more than words. Lately, Iran has begun replicating Russia's efforts to disrupt U.S. elections, pushing thousands of fake social media accounts.¹¹ And a study from 2018 showed Iran had responsibility for the death of more than 600 U.S. Armed Forces personnel between 2003 to 2011.¹² But Iran's aggression extends beyond their own direct action to the third-party actors they arm and fund that have killed thousands, including U.S. aligned non-combatants and Iraqi soldiers.¹³

When a country's leaders show us who they are, we must listen. Iran has shown us that we must never allow them to have nuclear weapons. While the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) left some issues unaddressed, I have been very alarmed by the President's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the agreement, incentivizing Iran to return to their pursuit of the bomb. As Georgia's next U.S. Senator, you can count on me to take Iran's nuclear threat seriously, and work to build broad-based coalitions for the future.

We must ensure our current situation does not escalate and destabilize the entirety of the Middle East. That requires holding Iran's third-party actors like Hezbollah accountable, and building back international coalitions that are prepared to bring sanctions and full diplomatic pressure to force Iran back to the negotiating table.

We cannot do this alone, but in the absence of true leadership from Washington, I am concerned about whether we are doing all that we can. To be clear, I am absolutely committed to seeing a diplomatic accord that accomplishes the original goal of the JCPOA which is the prevention of a nuclear Iran.

Standing with Israel

We are in a critical moment in the world, standing at an intersection of stability and chaos in the Middle East.

As Georgia's next U.S. Senator, I will stand with Israel and the Jewish people to protect their interests, advocate for the human dignity of the Palestinian people and their position in the world, promote peace, and ensure the U.S. remains economically strong, safe, and secure. I am able to protect all of these priorities because they are dependent on one another.

¹¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/07/25/its-not-just-russians-anymore-iranians-others-turn-up-disinformation-efforts-ahead-vote/>

¹² <https://www.newsweek.com/iran-us-iraq-war-troops-killed-efps-shiite-militias-1385990>

¹³ *Ibid.*

I will also strive to remember and serve by Dr. King's words on Israel:

"Peace for Israel means security, and we must stand with all our might to protect its right to exist, its territorial integrity. I see Israel as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security and that security must be a reality"¹⁴

Ultimately, we seek the realization of the prophet's vision:

"...They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid." (*Amos 4: 3b-4a*)

¹⁴ March 25, 1968 Rabbinical Assembly Address, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.