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GUEST COLUMN

Is peace still possible?

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Yael Dayan

One of the worst summers is behind us, as are the Jewish holidays. No excuses are left, and what seems to be "the last opportunity" for peace is just around the corner.

We have to ask ourselves — "we" being the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority — how honest are we in our rhetoric about peace? Is it a question of the limited price we, Israelis, are willing to pay, or is it a deeper fear of a resolution that will rule out a variety of options like an armed struggle ending in victory, additional territorial gains, perpetuation of our status of a victim or underdog, or a vague illusion that time serves the interests of either side?

The entire world, other than the people involved, seems to understand that the only win-win path to take is a two-state solution. Israelis and Palestinians perhaps live under the illusion that being less decisive now, gaining time, postponing a commitment, may bring about some additional points, another half-inch on the map, or one more United Nations vote.

This is a very dangerous and impossible calculation that exposes fears and schemes and can only mean a step away from a settlement and a step closer to bloodshed and loss of control.

The right-wing Israeli government is busy securing the results of the next elections, counting on military strength as a unifying factor, which is a poor substitute for moral strength and justice. The Palestinian Authority is underestimating President Barack Obama's commitment to peace, testing how far he will go in pressuring Israel. Rather than count on the generous

results of peace, both sides set the preconditions to it.

We, the peace camp in Israel, the U.S. and Europe, and the moderate Arab states have failed to be loud, stubborn and unyielding. There is no time to lose and no option left from which to choose.

The moderate Arab world has presented a plan — the Arab Peace Initiative. Rather than grab this roadmap, endorse it and see the immediate results it will produce, we back into self-created traps, semantics and mostly hypocritical demands to be recognized as a Jewish state, not having asked us Israelis if this is how we define ourselves. Why did we not ask this of King Hussein and Anwar Sadat? Will we recognize a future state as the Muslim homeland of the Palestinians? How harmfully creative can we manage to be in order not to do what is right and just and trans-parent?

There is a price to pay for peace. As high as it may be politically, monetarily or ideologically, it will always be lower than the cost of war. Israel is strong enough to make the difficult compromises, as the cost that the present status quo claims on our democracy, value system and centrality in the Jewish world is one that we cannot afford or tolerate.

Delays, excuses, a governing coalition that cannot share a huge ship without drowning it — not to mention the lack of one honest agreed-upon statement signed by the prime minister and his foreign and defense ministers — make one fearful of a potentially tragic outcome.

Do the Palestinians really want a state of their own? Does Israel really seek peace? If they do, as they declare — with the U.S as a most honest broker — don't we understand that the next move, if it is not immediately toward the negotiating table, will it be into the shelters and the trenches?

There is no way to love Israel and reject peace. There is no way to support a state of Palestine and reject the two-state solution.

Most of us know that it is time and know what is at stake if we fail. But the leaders must hear from you. They must know that there is a strong constituency for peace here in the United States — because the alternative to peace risks Israel's very future.

Yael Dayan, daughter of the late Israeli General Moshe Dayan, is a three-term member of the Knesset and the current chair of the Tel Aviv-Yafo City Council. J Street Eastern Maine will be hosting a conversation with Yael Dayan at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 10, at Beth Israel Synagogue, 144 York St., Bangor. For information, contact meeastern@jstreet.org or go to http://action.jstreet.org/c/8239/t/5534/content.jsp?content_KEY=3151.

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