

Time out: Grieving may be the best road to peace

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [August 14, 2002](#) issue

I am probably not alone in deploring both the suicide bombings carried out by young Palestinians against pathetically vulnerable Israeli civilians and the now predictable military attacks by Israel carried out against pathetically vulnerable Palestinian civilians. The placing of bombs in crowded marketplaces, on buses and in restaurants, and the strategic targeting of the people who plan the bombings and train the bombers—both activities result in tragic and innocent civilian deaths.

I am probably not alone in understanding that while there are occasions when a strong and efficient military response is necessary, the risks that go along with every military action are enormous and unpredictable. For what it's worth, I think the gulf war was a tragedy, but a necessary tragedy.

I know I am not alone in hoping and praying for the security of Israel and also for the creation of a viable and secure Palestinian nation. And I know I am not alone in desperately wishing my own government would play a more helpful and creative role and not appear to be so one-sided.

Moral clarity about what is transpiring in Jerusalem and Ramallah these days is hard to come by. Perhaps moral unease is the only proper posture.

This issue offers some resources for exploring that unease. David Gushee gives a fresh exegesis of "just war" doctrine, and a reminder of our unique context, unwelcome as it may be: "When we Americans talk about war and justice, we're not Swedes or Malaysians." John Kelsay also pursues the issue of justice in warfare, underscoring the importance of proportionality and discrimination, and he helps us understand, even if we don't want to, how suicide bombers seem like martyrs to many in the Muslim world. In a related article, George Hunsinger explores the momentum that has been generated in Washington behind a war with Iraq, and he reminds us how precarious and costly that enterprise would be.

Peacemaking requires the very best of us. It requires a strong military and the willingness to use it. But it also requires tenacity, courage and hope. My personal prayer is that Israel will not respond militarily to the next attack but instead will say something like this: “To honor our innocent victims, to consecrate the precious lives of our young people who have died, we will not respond by killing your innocent civilians. This time we will do nothing but grieve—and we invite you to join us in our grief.”

Military types will laugh at the naïveté and weakness of that response. But I sense that I am not at all alone in concluding that it is perhaps the only realistically hopeful response left.