

The Key to Peace Is Fidelity to the Oslo Accords

by [Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](#)

May 4, 1998

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](#)

Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute, a post he assumed in January 1993.



Articles & Testimony

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright says, is "in grave danger." Why? There are two main reasons. The first should be obvious: The Oslo accords have yet to produce very much peace. More Israelis have died in the 4 1/2 years since Oslo than did during the six previous years, dating back to the start of the Palestinian intifada in 1987.

The result is that most Israelis have not been, and certainly do not believe themselves to be, more secure as a result of Oslo. This sense of Israeli ambivalence about peace with the Palestinian Authority is the "crisis of confidence" that must be addressed if the peace process itself is to be saved.

The second reason for the peace process stalemate is less obvious and almost counterintuitive. In addition to not enough peace, there is also not enough process. This means there has been far too little emphasis placed on the need for implementation of existing agreements as prerequisite for future progress. Regrettably, this is a charge one can make against all three main parties in this process--Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United States.

But even more important is that the concept of compliance itself has never been given adequate emphasis by any of the parties. Here, the United States bears as much of the blame as do the principals.

From the beginning of this process and especially since the election of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nearly two years ago, U.S. policy has focused far more on seeking new agreements rather than monitoring the compliance of agreements already made. The focus on pushing forward is understandable, given the virtual absence of communication between Yasser Arafat and Netanyahu, but it has had the unfortunate side effect of giving one side, the Palestinian Authority, a virtual free ride in terms of its myriad outstanding promises, especially on security and incitement. This is especially sad because the United States is alone among world powers in understanding that the peace process is not merely a negotiation over the pace of Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank but rather a process of building a new Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Without a strong emphasis on compliance with past obligations, that relationship has no foundation.

In this regard, the current U.S. effort to bridge Israeli-Palestinian gaps by proposing an Israeli "redeployment" (Oslo-speak for withdrawal) of about 13% of the West Bank is wrong in principle and practice. It is not only the first time in 30 years that the United States is drawing a line on the map and suggesting that Israel withdraw behind it, but it also

directly contravenes U.S. promises to Israel that the extent of "further redeployments" are solely an Israeli decision. Ironically, Israel too bears considerable responsibility for this fair-weather approach to compliance. Though "reciprocity" has been a catchword of the Netanyahu government, it has rarely insisted upon the principle in practice. And to an extent far greater than under the previous Labor government, Israel compensated for problems in relations with Arafat by inviting the United States to take a deeper role than ever before in all aspects of the peace process.

Over time, this transformed the peace process from an Israeli-Palestinian negotiation into an Israeli-American one, with the Palestinians merely bystanders in this Washington-Jerusalem tango. Even with good will and the best of intentions on all sides, this is not a healthy situation.

The fix-it for the current stalemate is not a grand gesture of summitry or some other imaginative gimmick. The answer is in the Oslo accords themselves. Washington should refocus its diplomacy to emphasize compliance with all contractual obligations, to the letter of the Oslo accords and their ancillary agreements, such as the January 1997 Hebron "Note for the Record."

On the issue of redeployments, for example, the United States should refrain from offering its own idea of "percentages" of Israeli withdrawal, because that automatically becomes the new Palestinian bottom-line figure and forces Washington into a distracting and counterproductive negotiation with Jerusalem. At the same time, the United States should keep to the letter of past U.S.-Israeli agreements and remain faithful to the concept of three redeployments, the third of which is subject to the "final status talks" that should themselves convene immediately.

To the Palestinians, the U.S. should be consistent and unwavering in calling for full, immediate and unconditional fulfillment of outstanding Oslo obligations. The force of the administration's contention that "security is the sine qua non of the peace process" is undermined when the administration does not take a clear stand against conditioning improvement on Palestinian security efforts on Israel's own actions, such as further redeployments.

Now is not the time for Washington to intercede in the peace process with its own solutions; instead, now is the time for Israelis and Palestinians to calculate their own interests and decide their fate accordingly.

That's the formula that made Oslo work in 1993, and it's still valid today. ❖

Los Angeles Times

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

TOPICS

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)