# Keynote Address

Sep 21, 1997

**In-Depth Reports**

What I would like to do rather than brief on Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's trip to the Middle East, from which we have just returned, on what she did accomplish and what she did not, is share six observations about where we are and where we may be going. I am no longer an objective observer when it comes to these matters. I have seen over the last ten years things that I never dreamed or believed that I would ever see with respect to the pursuit of peace between Arabs and Israelis. I have had the fortune to play a very small role in the transformation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, one of the most deadly and costly conflicts of this century, into a process of accommodation that ultimately will, we hope, evolve into peace.

I believe that the transformation process is well underway and that it is irreversible. I urge you to keep that thought in mind, because it is absolutely essential that we try to strike a balance between what is possible and what is probable. Analysis and journalism more often than not are the art of the probable. One spends a lot of time explaining to people why something cannot happen. Diplomacy is the art of the possible. One spends most of the time trying to explain to people why something can happen. U.S. policy, with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict or any other conflict, frankly, is in essence about finding the right balance between what is possible on one hand and what is probable on the other.

First and foremost, it would not take a brilliant analyst to suggest that we are witnessing the most profound crisis in the pursuit of peace since the process began, certainly since I have been involved in it. It is profound because it is not a crisis between individuals or over discrete issues around the negotiating table. It is a crisis of confidence and partnership.

Oslo was always a defiance of history. It was an enterprise that defied the odds and depended on negotiators who were willing to trust, to believe, and to risk. It depended on a public and on moderate centrists who were willing to test the proposition that the Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis and Arabs could find a way to resolve their difficulties peacefully.

We have a crisis of confidence, we have a crisis in partnership, and we have the perception among the Israeli and Palestinian public that the very logic of negotiations is no longer capable of producing what they thought it could produce. We are talking about what people perceive peace to be. It is a fundamental change in the quality of their lives for the better. When that improvement does not occur, then it becomes in a sense an illusion.

The stakes of the peace process are now higher than ever before simply because we have an enormous amount to lose. At stake in this crisis is not just the Oslo accords or progress between Israelis and Palestinians; what is at stake is the idea that the Arab-Israeli conflict can be resolved peacefully through negotiations. If this process fails and an institutionalized collapse of this process follows, what is the alternative? It cannot be allowed to fail.

Second, the crisis may contain, in one of the many paradoxes of this process, the seeds of its own resolution. There has been much talk lately about the death of the Oslo process. In fundamental ways, however, the legacy of Oslo, however, in fundamental ways continues to shape and influence the current situation and will continue to influence

and shape the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The real significance of Oslo was mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians. Once mutual recognition was achieved-Israelis and Palestinians recognizing one another's identities and the legitimacy of those identities-there was no retreat into the past. That mutual recognition transformed what had been an existentialist conflict that could never be resolved into a political conflict that could be resolved.

Oslo has also shaped the physical situation in the area in such a manner that makes it permanent. The Israelis have withdrawn from Gaza and have redeployed from the West Bank's major cities and towns. Palestinians now control almost thirty percent of the West Bank. The vast majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are living under Palestinian self-government. That situation will not change. Most Palestinians go through an average day without seeing any Israelis, a reality that also probably will not change.

The ultimate premise of Oslo has not changed, that Israelis and Palestinians have a proximity problem. They are living on top of one another in a historic conflict. There are only two options: protracted confrontation or accommodation. The status quo is simply not tenable. This problem cannot be left alone. It is too explosive and too volatile. In that urgency and imperative lies a certain measure of hope.

Third, the Oslo contract, consisting of informal and formal understandings, negotiated and agreed to between 1993 and 1995, and sanctioned by the current government of Israel and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, has broken down in a fundamental way. Even if Oslo has changed, the fundamental contract must somehow be revitalized. The logic of Oslo, however, became elevated to a trade-off that became very difficult to maintain. The trade-off is very simple: In a series of implementing agreements, the Israelis and the Palestinians would find a way out of their problem. The Israelis would withdraw from Gaza and redeploy from large areas of the West Bank, maintaining the overriding responsibility for security. At the same time, the Palestinians would assume certain security obligations and responsibilities. They would set up a self-governing authority and the core issues would be deferred to negotiations on permanent status.

The Oslo trade-off could be reduced to one formulation, and therein lies the problem. Israeli security in exchange for a political process was the quid pro quo that seemed to emerge from the logic of Oslo. It was a very difficult proposition to maintain and became vulnerable to change, to domestic politics, and now to an absence of trust. That trade-off, although logical, needs to be revitalized in two fundamental respects.

Number one, security is not traded for a political process. If the Palestinians perceive the proposition in this manner, it will fail. Security becomes an admission ticket into a relationship with an adversary. You discharge your security obligations so that you can negotiate peacefully with your neighbor. Unfortunately, security cooperation has fallen victim to those who argue it should be used as a card to be played when the negotiations are going well and to be held when the negotiations are going badly. That suggestion is not sustainable.

It is impossible for anybody to control suicide terrorism or to hermetically seal Israel from suicide terror. Security must be pursued bilaterally between the Israelis and Palestinians and unilaterally by the Palestinians, who must take certain steps to preempt, counter, and ultimately delegitimize those elements in their own society who still politically espouse violence as a way to pressure and manipulate negotiations.

We will not have a peace process if we cannot create a credible baseline of security cooperation. The other half is a responsibility that the Israelis have in the process. Real security ultimately will depend on peace. We do not have peace. We need a political process to achieve peace, but we will not have a political process if we do not have a credible environment within which that process can succeed. To create this environment, you must take steps that promote rather than undermine confidence and refrain from steps that can be construed by your partner as prejudging or predetermining the outcome of the negotiations. The secretary has mentioned settlement activity,

land confiscation, house demolitions, and confiscation of identity cards. We cannot have a credible environment in which Israelis and Palestinians have agreed to negotiate issues like settlements, borders, and refugees in a permanent status arrangement when unilateral actions are being taken which prejudge those negotiations. Therefore, the Oslo contract needs to be revitalized.

Fourth, if there was any flaw in Oslo, it involved the notions of incrementalism and gradualism. It is no longer possible simply to assume that incremental steps can be taken to build trust and confidence and allow Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate the tough issues. In a way, incrementalism serves to undermine trust and confidence because the path becomes unclear if the destination is unknown.

We need an acceleration of permanent status negotiations. Acceleration does not occur at the expense of implementation of the interim arrangements, but Israelis and Palestinians need to begin quietly and discreetly, if necessary, signaling one another about where it is they want to go at the end of the day. If they do not, we will not be able to surmount the invariable, numerous, and repeated bumps in the road that have basically been the story of this process for some time. Does that proposition mean that permanent status negotiations can be finished in three months, six months, nine months, or a year? No. It means Israelis and Palestinians have to begin testing the proposition with one another whether or not-and I leave it as an open question-an honest person could do nothing short of that step, whether or not there is a possibility of convergence between an Israeli position and a Palestinian position on permanent status.

Fifth, Israeli-Palestinian peace cannot, should not, and will not be pursued in a vacuum. It is the foundation of the process to create a structure for peace agreements between Israel and the Arabs. The Arab-Israeli conflict was never taught or internalized by Arabs and Israelis as a conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It was always taught and internalized as a conflict between Israel and the Arabs. Unless it is addressed and resolved as a conflict between Israel and the Arab world, we are never going to have any hope of a resolution. Now that resolution has two components: agreements between Israel and the states with which Israel shares contiguous borders, including an Israeli-Syrian agreement and an Israeli-Lebanese agreement; and contacts and relations between Israel and the Arab world. Every Israeli prime minister with whom I have worked wanted to test the proposition whether there should be an Israeli agreement with Syria. This proposal is not an American desiderata, but is something in which the Israelis and the Syrians have expressed enormous interest. November 1, 1997, will be the sixth anniversary of the beginnings of Israeli-Syrian bilateral negotiations in Madrid, with no agreement. Finding a basis for resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon is very important.

Finally, and most important, how is the United States going to become involved in this Middle East peace process? The challenge for U.S. policy has always been finding a balance between doing too much on the one hand and not doing enough on the other.

We do not have a self-sustaining process, a situation that argues for a major American role. On the other hand, we are not quite at the point where the parties themselves are able to make the kinds of decisions required to create a self-sustaining process. When I say self-sustaining, I do not mean without a U.S. role, but rather a process in which Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis and Arabs-with or without U.S. assistance-accept that direct negotiation is the only choice. They must recognize that they each have legitimate requirements, even while they disagree, and they must try to negotiate those legitimate requirements, however long it takes.

What does the United States do? In October 1996, we began a three-month mediation effort following a fairly severe crisis that involved confrontation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces. That mediation effort was a test case. It was as intimate and as intense a mediation effort as the United States has ever launched or participated in with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. In fact, no Israeli prime minister had ever allowed the United States this close to an Israeli-Palestinian negotiation. We were involved because the Israelis and the Palestinians

wanted us to be involved, and we succeeded. That night, amid the champagne and the cigars and the embraces and the hugs, a Palestinian negotiator turned to me and said, "There is more mistrust and suspicion in this room tonight than there was when the process began." I laughed. I did not understand, but he turned out to be right. As valuable as the U.S. role was, as critical as it was to succeeding, we stood between the parties and obscured their view of one another. The partnership that we believed we had launched at Erez really was not much of a partnership because within three months we were all back in the soup again. That is where we are now. It may well be that at an appropriate point the United States will have to get more involved. We cannot obstruct, however, the parties' view of one another by using American commitments and assurances to broker a partnership between them.

The United States has three broad options. Option A is disengagement. Option C is micromanagement of the process, to impose and solution and make decisions in a conflict that is existentialist in nature. Option B, I would argue, is the right option. It has a public component and a private component. Option B is essentially this: The United States believes in the power of direct negotiations. We are willing to participate and assist the Israelis and the Palestinians, but we cannot have negotiations if the environment for those negotiations is somehow flawed and not credible. Both sides have responsibilities for making the environment credible.

Privately, the United States needs to help them work out a series of arrangements to make the environment credible. Does that guarantee success? Of course not, but at least it creates an environment that will give the negotiations a chance to succeed. That is the private component of diplomacy. The public diplomacy is also important, to try to provide a public frame of reference not on what the end game should be but on the issue of mutual responsibilities and the fact that the United States has interests in the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace that it has to protect.

Now, this proposal argues for a process. I see no other alternative. It is illogical to believe that a conflict as nasty and as entrenched as the Arab-Israeli conflict can be resolved in any other way than in phases. It evolved in phases over time and it will be resolved in phases over time. This particular phase-getting the Israeli-Palestinian dimension pointing in the right direction-is the critical phase. Without it, our efforts to broaden agreements with Israel's other neighbors or to promote the kinds of arrangements between Israel and the Arab states will have a difficult time succeeding.


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