

Keynote Address

Sep 19, 1997



In-Depth Reports

I come before this group at a critical moment in the history of the Middle East. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recent trip occurred on the heels of two horrific terrorist incidents amidst a fundamental crisis of confidence between Israel and the Palestinians. The situation in the Middle East had eroded to the point that the gains made on the Palestinian track and attempts to improve the worsened environment were threatened by what was happening on the ground. In essence, there was no sense that the Israelis and Palestinians possessed any shared interests, and each side actually perceived the other as actively working against its neighbor's interests.

As a result, pundits in the United States and the Middle East had already declared the peace process dead before Secretary Albright left for her trip. A postponement or cancellation of her trip in the wake of the Ben Yehuda Street bombing, however, would have rewarded terrorists who kill and maim innocent civilians and helped them to achieve their objective—literally to blow up the peace process.

As the president has said all too often, the United States cannot and will not allow the enemies of peace to achieve their goal of destroying the Middle East peace process. The terrorist bombs of a small minority should not prevent the will of the large majority, both Israeli and Palestinian, to see peace achieved. Obviously, the bombings made the secretary's trip more difficult, but they also made it more necessary and more urgent. Something had to be done to reverse the negative trend in virtually all Israeli and Palestinian interaction and to establish the basis for progress.

Although the Palestinian issue was the focus of media attention on the secretary's trip, the purpose of the trip was itself much broader. She wanted to demonstrate U.S. commitment to a truly comprehensive peace, one that would include not only peace between Palestinians and Israelis, but also between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. U.S. encouragement and support for the peacemakers led her to Egypt and Jordan, countries with which the United States maintains close relations as well as achieves meaningful cooperation on the peace process. The secretary's visit to Saudi Arabia to meet with Saudi and Gulf Cooperation Council senior officials emphasized the importance that the United States attaches to its commitment to the security of the Gulf region.

The reaching of a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arabs, the maintenance of Israel's security and its well-being, and the deterrence of threats to the stability of the Gulf and elsewhere posed by Iraq and Iran may seem like a disparate list of Middle East issues. Yet, they are all national interests of the United States and clearly interrelated. Progress in the Middle East peace process strengthens friendly governments in the region, removes a rallying point for fanaticism, maintains U.S. access to Persian Gulf oil resources, and enhances prospects for political and economic development. The absence of progress in the peace process, on the other hand, increases tensions, spurs rearmament and violence, wins new converts to extremism, and potentially endangers U.S. access to oil.

The Middle East peace process is not dead. We said before the secretary's departure that the current problems in the peace process were extremely difficult. The secretary is not a magician and thus would not be able to say at the completion of her trip that everything was perfectly splendid. The parties to the peace process have accomplished a significant amount since the Madrid conference, a fact that people often forget in the present atmosphere of mistrust and worse. The mistrust among them is, however, currently very deep. Further, the issues about which the parties

are distrustful of one another are fundamental ones-fundamental to security, without which there can be no peace; and fundamental to peace, without which lasting security is clearly impossible.

The secretary's goal was to begin recreating the environment in which the negotiating process could move forward. In essence, she was trying to restore the rules of the game. It was inevitable that, given the bombings, the focus of the secretary's opening discussions would be on security. Primary among the rules of the game was the need to do everything possible to prevent a spread and increase in terror.

More broadly, the parties also had to begin thinking about each other again as partners in the same game in which, through cooperation, they can gain much more than if either side continues to seek unilateral gain on its own. As the intermediary in these talks, the United States must often play with the cards that are dealt rather than the ones it would choose. The secretary was in essence telling the parties that they had to start dealing the United States, as the intermediary, better cards.

Although we believe that the secretary's trip achieved some positive steps, these were small steps in the history of the process. The secretary frankly wished that a great deal more could have been accomplished. More significant moves are now necessary, and she has reiterated her commitment to remain absorbed in the issues and to keep the process moving with the idea of achieving success. She also made clear that the peace process depends upon the leaders themselves. They must make tough decisions to create the right environment to create progress.

Governments cannot negotiate-and people should not have to live-under conditions of violent intimidation. There can be no peace process without security, and it is equally true that the phrase can be reversed. The United States will never accept a rationale for terrorism, and neither should the Palestinians. Zero tolerance for terror must begin immediately and must not waiver. The Secretary Albright was tough, blunt, and specific with Palestinian Authority chairman Yasir Arafat on what was needed from him. In addition to better cooperation with Israeli security forces, she said the Palestinian Authority had to take more unilateral action to root out the terrorist infrastructure, to arrest and prosecute those engaged in terrorism or the planning of terrorist acts, and to keep incarcerated those found guilty.

We began to see more cooperation between the Palestinians and Israelis before the secretary departed, but clearly more needs to be done. The gap between the unilateral actions that were taken and what needed to be done was even greater. Chairman Arafat told the secretary in Ramallah that he rejected violence and terrorism and was committed to meeting his responsibilities. Because words and images are important, the secretary reminded Arafat of the negative effects of recent contacts he had made with Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders.

A public rejection of terror is useful, but only if it is followed by actual, sustained, and effective action on the ground that undercuts the terrorist groups. We accept the Palestinian argument that terrorist bombers are striking not only at Israeli citizens but at the very heart of the peace process itself. The Palestinian leadership should accept that taking every possible measure to prevent terror is their responsibility and in their best interest.

The United States needs 100 percent effort from the peace process participants. We do not expect that Palestinians will produce 100 percent results, nor can the Israelis, as they have acknowledged. What is required is 100 percent effort. When will the Palestinians have taken the necessary steps regarding security? The United States believes very clearly that we will know it when we see it.

Security was the secretary's first message, but certainly not her only one. As the secretary said during the trip, real security depends upon real peace. Israelis and Palestinians must both understand that the end result of the process will be better than the current situation. For that reason, the secretary devised and promoted during the trip her plan calling for continued and complete implementation of all commitments made in the interim agreement in tandem with the accelerated movement to permanent status talks favored by Israel. The secretary expressed her

understanding of Palestinian frustration caused by the expansion of settlements, confiscation of land, confiscation of Jerusalem identity cards, demolitions of housing, closures of borders, and withholding of tax revenue. She then called for a time out, or a pause, in such unilateral Israeli actions as provocative settlement activity, land confiscation, and similar actions, to restore confidence that neither side is trying to prejudice the outcome of what the parties have agreed to negotiate.

The United States recognizes Israel's right to impose measures to protect its people, but we have encouraged it to find a way to balance its security needs with the need for Palestinian social and, especially, economic well-being. Palestinian well-being is in Israel's interest and in the interests of the peace process itself.

Full action on regional security is the sine qua non for forward movement, but the peace process itself will not succeed unless political issues are addressed to the satisfaction of both sides. If the parties succeed in this regard, the resulting progress will provide something close to a guarantee of long-term security that the peoples of this region long for and which they certainly deserve. The fight against terrorism must occur now, but for that fight to succeed the parties must deal with the economic issues and create the appropriate political context. The secretary's trip did not and could not change the reality that the parties must take these actions for themselves. The United States will do all it can, which will not be enough if the parties do not view each other as partners. The secretary left the region fully believing that, despite the obvious difficulties, the parties were capable of working together and moving forward. We hope her trip made this progress somewhat more likely.

Pursuing peace means working on a broad front. The roles of Egypt and Jordan are extremely important to the prospects for a Palestinian-Israeli peace. The secretary had productive discussions with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Hussein on how best to move the peace process forward. Both were frank in their advice of what was necessary. They publicly condemned the use of terrorism and promised to take all necessary actions to prevent it. They also urged Israel to implement the interim agreement fully and to take steps to restore Palestinian confidence in the process. Secretary Albright will continue to work closely with both of these supporters of the peace process.

U.S. efforts to bring peace to the Middle East are not limited to diplomacy. They also include close security cooperation with Israel, U.S. economic assistance to the Palestinian people, and U.S. support for those countries that are working to move the process forward, including Jordan and Egypt. As a measure of that support, President Bill Clinton recently established the Middle East Peace and Stability Fund. The assistance the fund will provide to Jordan will help to consolidate the peace between Israel and Jordan and to broaden the circle of those who have a stake in a secure Middle East.

Another important aspect of U.S. support for the peace process is U.S. assistance to the Palestinian people. Frankly, the Clinton administration cannot support current congressional proposals seeking to cut off aid to the Palestinians. We share congressional concerns about the Palestinian Authority adhering to its commitments and preventing terror. No one in the United States is working harder than this administration to protect the security of the people of Israel. I have participated in many of those efforts, and our security commitment will never waiver. Cutting off U.S. assistance to ordinary Palestinians, however, is not the appropriate method of indicating our concerns about the Palestinian Authority. To deny aid to those people, surely making their very difficult situation and lives even more difficult, would not enhance stability and security in the area. It would make peace more difficult to pursue because it would increase polarization and negatively affect the Arab constituency that can be most helpful in pursuing the process. Proposed congressional legislation regarding Jerusalem would similarly complicate the pursuit of peace by changing the long-time U.S. policy of not prejudging the outcome of issues the Israelis and the Palestinians have agreed to handle in the permanent status talks. The secretary discussed the results of her trip with Congress yesterday, and we will be in close consultation on legislation that affects U.S. peace process efforts.

Whereas her most immediate concern was necessarily the Israeli-Palestinian track of the peace process, Secretary Albright also discussed the need for a truly comprehensive peace between the Israelis and Arabs, including Syria and Lebanon. In Syria, the secretary explored ways to resume the negotiations between Syria and Israel that have yielded significant progress. The United States continues to believe that Israel and Syria remain interested in reaching an agreement and desire to resume negotiations, although they are clearly divided on the basis for resumption of the talks. The secretary will discuss this issue further with Foreign Ministers David Levy of Israel and Faruq al-Shara of Syria when they meet next week in New York. The secretary has also asked Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad for his assistance in preventing flareups in Lebanon and impressed upon him the need to restrain Hizballah. Finally, she emphasized the proven benefits of using the Israel-Lebanon monitoring group in diffusing tensions and deescalating the cycle of violence and retaliation in southern Lebanon.

Although it was not originally on her itinerary, the secretary decided to make a stop in Lebanon to demonstrate U.S. support for that country, its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a comprehensive peace settlement. She expressed U.S. support for efforts to stabilize and rebuild Lebanon. She said she was pleased that passport restrictions by the United States had ended. She emphasized to the Lebanese leadership that the United States remains concerned about the safety of Americans traveling in Lebanon and that we were counting on the Lebanese to help to provide a secure environment and to assist in U.S. efforts to eliminate terrorism emanating from the region.

U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf was clearly another focal point of the secretary's trip. She met with the Saudi leadership and with representatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The United States believes that it has good friends in the Gulf, that the Gulf will remain a low-cost producer of oil exports to the United States and the developed world as a whole, and that the United States and its allies should take all possible actions to maintain stability in the region for the sake of our friends and for access to oil. The secretary briefed the Saudi leaders and the GCC ministers on the results of her peace process discussions. Because the nations of the Gulf have their own role to play in the peace process, the secretary encouraged the Gulf states to do all that they could to support the process. She also urged them to do all they can to stop the flow of private aid to the enemies of peace.

Obviously, the challenges to regional peace and security posed by Iraq and Iran were high on the secretary's Gulf agenda. If U.S. policy on Iraq is working, we ought not to change it. Iraqi president Saddam Hussein must continue to feel American and international pressure to comply with all United Nations (UN) resolutions. We have seen nothing to indicate that the Baghdad regime has changed the attitudes and policies that earned it the international condemnation and the imposition of one of the toughest sanctions regimes in the history of the world. In fact, the Iraqi regime directly interfered with the UN Special Commission monitoring flights just a week ago and, within the last several days, was again condemned by the Security Council. The Council will be looking in the very near future at a six-month report on Iraqi behavior, but this behavior has led the Council to renew sanctions more than thirty times since 1990.

The Iraqi government continues to bear responsibility for the deep suffering of its own people. The Iraqi regime cynically causes delays in the distribution of humanitarian goods by its refusal to sell oil for two months, and it continues to evade its responsibilities on its weapons of mass destruction programs. This same regime also praised the recent terrorist bombings in Jerusalem.

Faced with that kind of conduct, it is essential that the international community maintain the sanctions on Iraq until Baghdad complies with its UN obligations and supports the UN Special Commission's efforts to uncover all vestiges of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs. The United States left that message with the Saudi leaders and with the GCC foreign ministers. Based on their reply, we have every reason to believe that it was a very welcome message.

The new Iranian government has tried to make overtures to its Gulf neighbors and will host the Organization of the

Islamic Conference summit in December. Therefore, the secretary's trip provided a timely opportunity to exchange views on Iran with our Gulf friends. The secretary told our friends that we considered the election of President Muhammad Khatemi an interesting development. The people of Iran made a choice, and the overwhelming majority of voters expressed a clear desire for change. The United States remains concerned, however, about Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles to deliver them, its active support for terrorism, and its violent opposition to the peace process. We hope that Khatemi's election will lead to changes in those Iranian policies that violate international norms, but the United States will continue to look for changes of specific policies, not just of personalities. If the secretary's trip is an indication, the nations of the Gulf are looking for similar actions. The secretary heard deep concerns about Iran's weapons of mass destruction programs at several stops in Arab states as well as in Israel. The United States remains committed to a vigorous international campaign to prevent the transfer to Iran of facilities and technologies that could further Tehran's program to develop weapons of mass destruction and a means of delivering them, as well as its program to develop advanced conventional high technology weapons.

Russia's involvement with Iran in this area is currently an issue of concern in U.S.-Russian relations. Thus, it is a central part of our continuing high-level bilateral dialogue. Russia has agreed to limit the scope of its nuclear cooperation with Iran, and we will continue to emphasize our opposition to any nuclear cooperation with Iran. Iran's acquisition of long-range missile-delivery capability would pose a serious threat to U.S. forces and to regional and international stability. The Russians have assured us that they will uphold the highest nonproliferation standards, but the United States is disturbed by recent reports that Russian entities may have provided ballistic missile-related assistance to Tehran and thus endangered the integrity of the missile technology control regime that the United States and Russia have agreed to put in place. President Clinton has raised his concerns with Russian president Boris Yeltsin on several occasions. Ambassador Frank Wisner has just met with the Russians in Moscow to pursue these very concerns. We are in close consultation with the Israeli government on the situation and Ambassador Wisner will shortly have a report for them.

In the economic sphere, we are trying to raise the cost to Iran of its own actions. At some point, we hope, Iran will move to alter its course. So far, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act has helped to deter foreign investment in Iran's petroleum sector, the primary source of Iranian government revenues. Our continued efforts to implement the law, however, place us at odds with a number of our allies. We are working with our European Union (EU) allies to develop greater convergence between our approaches toward Iran in the belief that a more united front will leave Tehran with fewer options and will increase the pressure for change.

The United States and the EU appear to agree on the fundamental problems caused by Iranian actions regarding weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and its opposition to the Middle East peace process. We understand that U.S. allies may have different views on the best method of achieving our common goal of convincing Iran to change policies in these critical areas of concern. Our problem with EU efforts to engage Iran stems from the lack of change that this approach has produced and the inappropriate signal it may send to Tehran, a signal of encouragement rather than deterrence.

The United States has offered to open its own publicly acknowledged dialogue with an authoritative representative of the Iranian government. We would use that dialogue to raise our serious concerns about specific elements of Iran's international policies and practices, and we are fully prepared to discuss the concerns that the Iranians may hold.

In conclusion, Secretary Albright's first trip to the Middle East was merely the latest manifestation of the strong U.S. commitment to the region and to the peace process. Regardless of the problems, the secretary was struck by the strong desire for peace among the peoples of the region. We have a responsibility and a reason to keep our noses to the grindstones in the Middle East, particularly on the peace process, to build upon what has been achieved, and to finish the job. The parties involved must also remind themselves that they stand to gain from a successful conclusion

to this process. Secretary Albright recently hosted Israeli, Palestinian, Egyptian, Jordanian, Moroccan, Tunisian, and Kuwaiti youth in the Seeds of Peace summer camp. The greatest impression on all of us was made by the surprising, frank admission of a young Palestinian girl that, had she been back home in Ramallah at the time of the July 30 bombing in Jerusalem, she would not have cared about it. As it happened, because she had spent time with young Israeli people and exchanged perspectives, she cried and participated in lowering her flag when she learned of the bombing. I can use many dry words to say that the parties to the peace process must take each other's interests and concerns into account for this process to succeed, but this young girl's message said it more eloquently than I ever could.

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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

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Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

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



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Facing Syria's Food Crisis

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Ishtar Al Shami

(/policy-analysis/facing-syrias-food-crisis)

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REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Israel \(/policy-analysis/israel\)](/policy-analysis/israel)

[Palestinians \(/policy-analysis/palestinians\)](/policy-analysis/palestinians)