

Israel:

Strategy for Peace and Security

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

In May 1996, the peace process was not the dynamic, successful set of negotiations that many today retrospectively claim it was. In fact, the Israeli-Palestinian track was on the verge of collapse. Had it been making real progress, Binyamin Netanyahu would not have been elected prime minister. Thus, when the current Likud government took office, Israel faced a dilemma over how to deal with a peace process that has many difficulties.

From the time the Declaration of Principles was signed in September 1993 until May 1996, the Israeli people suffered approximately 250 fatalities resulting from terrorism. That is equal to the number of casualties Israel suffered from terrorism for the entire decade prior to 1993. Moreover, instead of facing the threat of terror in remote areas and areas under dispute (i.e. West Bank) as Israel had in the past, terror attacks were being conducted in Israeli cities like Afula, Hadera, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. Furthermore, the pattern of terrorism had changed as well. The mortality rate of terrorist attacks had greatly increased, as did the sophistication of explosives acquired by the terrorists. The evolution of events over these three years deeply disappointed even those Israelis who had expected the peace process to deliver the bare minimum of results—greater security.

Violence: An Unacceptable Means of Negotiation The problems Israel faces on the Palestinian track are not unique. These same problems existed on the Syrian track as well. Just as the previous Labor government continued to pursue the Palestinian track while Israel suffered from terrorism originating from PA-controlled land, a similar situation existed on the Syrian track. The Labor government continued to negotiate with Syria while simultaneously enduring attacks launched by Syria's Lebanese proxy, Hizbollah. Between May 1995 and May 1996, 200 katyusha rockets fell on the Galilee. During this time span, much of Kiryat Shmona's population had fled their homes out of fear. Thus, on the one hand, there was considerable progress on the peace talks between Israel and Syria, while on the other, Israel faced increased insecurity. In this way, both Syria and the Palestinian Authority have and continue to use violence as a means to achieve concessions from Israel.

Once Israel acknowledges that Arab parties continue to use violence as part of the equation of negotiating peace, Israel then faces three alternatives:

- Israel could ignore the violence and pursue the peace process as though the violence did not exist;

- Israel could say the peace process is discredited, and suspend all peacemaking efforts;
- Israel could try to fix an impaired peace process so that it could proceed on a sounder basis.

This last option has been the route Prime Minister Netanyahu has chosen to follow. In order to make the process work, Israel's Likud-led government has incorporated two components into the peace process. The first is an increased focus on security. The Likud government decided that security would be the measure of success by which the peace process would be judged. Israel made it very clear to the Palestinian Authority after Netanyahu took office that the peace process would not be able to move ahead as long as terrorist attacks originating from PA-controlled territories continued. The second component is the issue of reciprocity. Specifically, the Likud government decided—and made clear to the Palestinians and its other Arab partners—that Israel would no longer overlook the violations or non-compliance of past obligations. These two components were introduced into the Oslo process during the Hebron negotiations. Both parties agreed that security and reciprocity were key issues of a successful peace process, and this agreement was specified in the "Note for the Record" drawn up by U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross.

In signing the "Note for the Record," the Palestinians agreed to put forth a 100 percent effort in preventing terror against Israel, but they clearly have not lived up to their end. Under the agreement, the PA agreed to work towards eradicating the security threat to Israel from the territories under its control. Israel recognizes that there is no foolproof way to prevent all terrorism; however, it is possible to greatly decrease the threat of terrorism by eliminating the infrastructure of terrorist organizations. Without a strong infrastructure within the territories, groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad would pose much less of a threat to Israel's security than is currently the case. The Government of Israel has compelling evidence that Palestinian leaders issued a "green light" to pursue terror attacks against Israel in the past. For instance, in August 1996, the PA released from prison Hamas and Islamic Jihad military operatives, many of whom had received formal training in the use of explosives against Israel. It is unrealistic to expect the peace process to move ahead when the PA continues to condone violence against Israel in this way. This is not conducive to making peace.

The Role of the International Community In order for the peace process to be successful, certain rules must be established and the international community can play an important role by insisting on these rules. First, no political disagreement can justify violence, either direct or indirect (i.e. incitement, maintaining infrastructure of terrorist organizations). When confronted with violence, the international community cannot take an "even-handed" approach because this will give the impression that violence is an acceptable form of negotiation. Second, neither Israel nor its partners in negotiation can be allowed to cut off the lines of communication. Third, both sides must have realistic expectations of what the outcome of this process will be. The Likud government has demonstrated its practicality by accepting and implementing the Oslo Accord and signified its acceptance of a broad territorial compromise in the "Allon-Plus" plan. Arafat must now do the same.

Conclusions Violence continues to be used as a means of pressuring Israel. Some people may think that violence is an inherent part of the Middle East equation and, therefore, Israel should proceed with negotiations while ignoring terrorist attacks. However, a peace process under such a premise is simply unacceptable. The use of violence has not always been present in the Middle East when negotiating peace, and it will not be accepted this time around either. When Israel negotiated peace with Egypt, Sadat traveled to Jerusalem and stated explicitly that there must be an end to war. Violence also had no part in the Israeli-Jordanian negotiations. The use of violence as a means of pressuring Israel must be stopped. Israel has the will to reach an agreement, but it will never be able to do so unless the Palestinians accept the two critical Israeli requirements of security and reciprocity.

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