

# A Race for the Future of the Middle East:

## An Address by the Israeli Prime Minister

by [Shimon Peres \(/experts/shimon-peres\)](#)

Apr 30, 1996

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Shimon Peres \(/experts/shimon-peres\)](#)

Shimon Peres was a leading Israeli statesman and Nobel laureate whose political career spanned seven decades and included service as president, prime minister, defense minister, and foreign minister of the State of Israel.



Brief Analysis

**O**n April 29, 1996, Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following are edited excerpts from his comments, as transcribed by Federal News Service.

### Peace, Prosperity, and Problems on the Road Ahead

For the next four years, before the end of this century, there will be an ongoing race of very serious consequences. On the one hand, there is the fundamentalist movement that bases itself on poverty and the mysticism of heaven using terror; trying to attain a nuclear capacity; and using all the tactics that Machiavelli has offered to subversive groups, namely, the idea that the goal justifies the means. So, they permit themselves to cheat, to lie, to kill, to undercut. And, in our case, there is a country that serves as its headquarters, Iran. There are several organizations which take orders from Iran Hezbollah, the Jihad, and Hamas. On the other hand, there is a coalition for peace and progress, comprising already several Arab countries and Israel. All of us hope to join in this peace and prosperity in the twenty-first century.

It is either us or them to win the race. The time is not very long. What we can contribute in this race is . . . to try to reach a permanent solution. We made peace with Jordan, which is a rather successful peace. We are trying to make peace with Lebanon and Syria. If we shall attain it, there will not remain a single reason for the ongoing belligerence and hatred in the Middle East.

We also understand that it is not enough to bring an end to war; you have to introduce a beginning for a different economic standard of living. Nowadays, economy is not a matter of domination but a matter of competition. And the real change in political terms is that if in the past, leaders tried to politicize their economies, now they understand they have to economize their policies.

We are very lucky that at the head of this necessary change stands the United States of America. The United States of America stood against the danger of Communism. Today it stands against the danger of fundamentalism, of terror, of violence, of the spread of nuclear capacities in the hands of irresponsible countries, of mafias, of people. And it is supporting or leading, actually the dual effort to bring an end to wars, whether in Bosnia or in Haiti or in the Middle

East, and to prevent subversive forces.

It is a difficult road. It's like hiring a car or buying a car and embarking on an unpaved road that leads to peace. You start to drive, and you have a problem with one of your wheels; so you stop, you repair it. You continue; you find a stone, you stop, and you put aside the stone. You go on and you have a mine and another mine; you have to clear the road of mines. But while you are clearing the road of mines, never forget the horizon. Never forget the destiny, which is peace and prosperity for all people.

### **Syria and the Ceasefire in Lebanon**

What we have learned from the last operation is that you can reach an agreement with Syria, but to say that this is an easy experience would be highly exaggerated. But better to have the difficulties in order to attain peace than the comfort of not negotiating. Like the negotiations under Kissinger, so the negotiations under Christopher; both of them have found it is very difficult to reach an agreement with Assad. But once he agreed, . . . he respects it. Now we have one experience on the Golan Heights. I hope that a second experience will follow suit.

We did destroy in villages where there were clearly positions of Hezbollah or homes of Hezbollah. I don't think it included more than maybe one building in a village. Otherwise, we were careful to keep the villages intact. It wasn't our intention at all to cause any destruction. There was a problem of electricity, and again, we didn't bomb the power station. We destroyed a transformer, after they have destroyed a transformer in Kiryat Shmona. And also, we did it with great restraint, as much as we could. Now, if the Lebanese will be ready to, we are ready to consider to help to reconstruct the part of southern Lebanon. I want to repeat: The Lebanese are not our enemies. We don't want to make their lives miserable or difficult. On the contrary, for many good years we have had a very friendly relationship, even informal, until the PLO came in and became a state within a state, and an army within an army. And now the same story with Hezbollah.

The Syrians do not claim that they control Lebanon, but just inspire it. And as an inspirational force, they're reluctant to sign. I don't think Hariri would probably sign himself. . . . The problem of Lebanon, for the time being, is that they're in between the killing of Hezbollah and the inspiration of Syria something that limits very much the territorial integrity of the land and the capacity to maintain independence.

As far as we are concerned, we would be happy to see an independent Lebanon, and we have indicated to the Lebanese, once they have one armed authority, their land will no longer be divided. When they have two armed authorities, and each authority is shooting in a different direction, they shouldn't be surprised that they lose the integrity of their land. Now, I think what was shown in the agreement is that there is a real Lebanese interest to have Hezbollah stop shooting which is stopping the restoration of the Lebanese life and I think Syria felt that they carry a certain responsibility.

I think the fact that this agreement is in writing, though it's not signed yet, and that it was initiated and carried out by the United States, is the best bet we could have achieved under the present circumstances. In the eyes of Syria, America is even a larger country than Israel. And if they want to make peace, it's first of all with the United States, and then with Israel. So an American document, in my judgment, has a very heavy commitment in the eyes of the Syrians.

I think there is a role, and we welcome the role, of the French in negotiations. But I do believe the best way to exercise it is in coordination with the United States of America. All the peace agreements that were reached, from Camp David on, were really guided and followed by the United States. . . . The United States, in our times, is the only country that has the mechanism and the national will. Now, I know that the United States is ready to cooperate with Europe, and I do believe that Europe and the United States will find the necessary language and mechanism not to create a conflict while trying to solve conflicts. And the last agreement has a French introduction in the monitoring

section. The president told us yesterday night that he's quite happy with it. And we have nothing against a French taste added to the process of peace.

### **Peace with the PLO**

Peace does not mean that one party accepts the dream of the other party. Even when you make a compromise, it is not on dreams but on positions. . . . The difference between a dream and an agreement is that for a dream, it is sufficient to have one; for an agreement, you need two. So we are talking about agreements, not about exchanges of dreams.

I think the Palestinians won in their negotiations with us more than they have ever experienced in their relations with the previous rulers of the West Bank and Gaza when those areas were under Arab rule. Never did the Palestinians enjoy autonomy, authority, responsibility. And we did it not because anybody pressed us. We handed over willingly the six major cities, 450 villages. We tried to be supportive.

At the beginning, Mr. Arafat thought that he could reach an understanding with Hamas. He has learned that Hamas bombs in Israel endanger the agreement between him and Israel. And furthermore, he has learned that this is a danger to his own authority, to his own existence. For that reason, I believe that today Arafat understands that he has to fight terror in those areas which are under his jurisdiction. And, I think, in a way he understands that what we are doing, including the closure, is a must in order to defend the land from further bombings.

We have an agenda, and I think it's more or less agreed. We have expected him to change the covenant, to delete from it all those articles that call for the destruction of Israel. And I must say, he did it, and we appreciate it. We have to be fair.

### **Problems in Egypt-Israel Relations**

Any analysis of sourness sounds very sour. I do hope that our relations with Egypt will be enriched and improved, and there too, you need patience. . . . At the beginning, the saying was "Land for peace." We gave back all the land. Did we get all of the peace?

I'm not sure that I can explain why Egypt took its position [on Israel's assumed nuclear deterrent], because when the Camp David agreement was signed, the Dimona Nuclear Installation was at the same place as it is now. Nothing has changed. And as long as Egypt or us or anybody cannot stop the Iranian strategies and threat, why should anybody think that Israel has to undress ourselves naked and say to all the countries that want to destroy her, "Don't you worry; you can destroy us"? We don't intend to become a collective Salman Rushdie, even if somebody will suggest to us to do so.

### **New Items in U.S.-Israel Relations**

We are talking about two different things. One is an agreement on anti-terror combat. I think the time is ripe for it, and I do believe we are going to sign it. Then, there is another proposal to have a defense pact. It has certain advantages, but it also has certain problems. I do not see any reason to decide on it in a hurry. We have time to study it. And I do believe that the United States and Israel will decide, in a study group, to have a good look at the pros and cons.

Our relations with the United States are different from any other relations with many countries in the world. Usually, when you have a defense pact with another country, you send your boys, your soldiers. We do not ask for American soldiers to come and defend Israel. So, that's a major difference under any pact. The maximum we can think of is to have, maybe, American technicians watching a peace agreement like the case, for example, in Sinai, where the United States is participating in the multilateral group to guarantee the peace between Egypt and Israel.

There is also a problem of the scope of the agreement. As in the anti-terror agreement, I do hope it will be open-

ended; namely, if other countries would like to join in a pact against terror, they will be welcome, because as I see it today, the dividing camps are not Arabs and Israelis, but pro-terror and against terror. The same goes for a pact. If you ask me, my real desire would be to have a defense pact with all countries in the Middle East, to stop war. So I do believe we shall begin now to have a good look at what will be the best way to do so, the best timing, and the best framework.

To conclude, I would say on the anti-terror story, the time is ripe to sign. On the defense pact, the time has come to check.

### **Closer Turkey-Israel Relations**

As we see it, in the Muslim world there are two schools of thought. One is the fundamentalist one headed by Iran, and the other is the modern one, shall I say the democratic one, headed by Turkey. Clearly, we are on the side of the Turkish leadership in that struggle, as clearly we are against the Khomeini-like attempt. So the political basis is very clear. It is not because we are party to the problems or the conflicts that Turkey may have. But Turkey is the leading Muslim country in the Muslim world today, in my judgment, for democracy, modernism, and market economy.

The so-called military alliance is more of a technical nature. It is not that we have joined in forces to fight an enemy or to defend something, but really to exchange information, to learn from each other. It is not aimed against anybody, against any other country. And when I see the nervousness, I don't understand why they should be nervous about it. Neither Turkey nor us aim to attack anybody or even to pose a threat. We want to cooperate to develop our countries. We have a common interest to see that fundamentalism will not win the day. ❖

---

## **RECOMMENDED**

---

### **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)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## [Facing Syria's Food Crisis](#)

Feb 14, 2022



Ishtar Al Shami

[\(/policy-analysis/facing-syrias-food-crisis\)](#)

### TOPICS

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

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