

Widening the Circle of Peace in the Middle East

Oct 15, 1993



In-Depth Reports

The Peace Process: The First Nine Months

It was with great personal satisfaction that I witnessed the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles last month. That moment, captured indelibly by a handshake between old adversaries, showed us that the impossible is within our reach -- that the bright promise of the future can chase out the dark specters of a bitter past.

The world correctly focused on that historic handshake that shook the world. Yet anyone watching the event on the White House lawn saw something equally moving in the words and demeanor of my friend, the Israeli prime minister. Choked with emotion, the former IDF chief of staff voiced his hopes for, but also his concerns about, this new start.

I can understand, at least partly, the prime minister's strong feelings. In my nine months as secretary of state -- on top of my earlier tenure in the department -- I have felt the tragedy and the hope of Arab-Israeli relations. I am moved by the promise of peace for Israel and its Arab neighbors. And I know that promise is unlikely to be fulfilled if we do not play our part. American leadership is required. And that is in our interest, in Israel's interest, and in the region's interest.

Every American president since Harry Truman has understood the strategic importance of pursuing peace in the Middle East. Although the bipolar world of the past complicated the pursuit of peace, it did not prevent American efforts. The disengagement agreements in the mid-1970s and Camp David provided essential building blocks.

With the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the Middle East was no longer beset by the rivalry of superpowers. The flow of arms was reduced, and the military option against Israel was clearly diminished. And with Saddam Hussein's radical challenge decisively turned back in the Gulf War, the region's balance of power was tilted toward moderation and the chance for reconciliation. The Madrid conference broke the taboo on direct talks and launched a process that sought to transform that chance into reality.

From the beginning of this administration, President Clinton understood that in this new political landscape, the context for peace-making was dramatically improved. But he also understood that peace-making would succeed only with active American engagement -- and only if Israel felt strong and secure enough to take risks for peace.

We have made clear our unyielding commitment to Israel's security and our willingness to be a full partner for peace. Let me reaffirm to you, as I have to Arab leaders and diplomats, that our commitment to Israel -- to its security and its qualitative edge -- remains a cornerstone of our policy in the Middle East. Indeed, for me, it is an article of faith and a fundamental principle that guides our policy.

From my first days as secretary, I became immersed in the peace process, not only to solve immediate problems, but to let all the parties know that America would be actively engaged. The Clinton administration accepted the wisdom of the Madrid framework and entered office fully committed to move it forward. We understood that direct negotiations, based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, were the surest way to achieve a comprehensive peace. We understood, too, that this peace must take account of Israel's security concerns and the

legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

Yet we faced a problem. In the wake of Israel's temporary expulsion of more than 400 Hamas activists -- following a series of violent attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians -- the parties were unable to agree on returning to the peace talks. Working closely with Prime Minister Rabin, we crafted a proposal with a timetable for the return of the deportees. As a result of our efforts -- including a February trip to the region, my first abroad as secretary -- we brought the parties back to the table in the spring.

This was not the only time that we had to intervene strenuously to salvage and energize the process. Tension in southern Lebanon erupted in July, as Katyushas rained down on Israeli towns in northern Galilee and as the IDF responded with a sustained aerial bombardment. We consulted closely with regional parties. Many late night calls were made. And we brokered a cease-fire that, to date, has held.

That is what is required: the ability to sustain the talks and insulate them from inevitable pressures. This we have done. Indeed, had we not, the spectacular breakthrough in the secret talks in Oslo would have been hard to imagine. For almost two years, under a Republican and Democratic president, America's sustained diplomatic involvement -- whether in presenting a draft declaration of principles or in constantly pushing to define the parameters of the possible -- set the stage for decision-making in the secret Oslo channel. Their creativity and courage enabled them to leap over old fears and break new ground on the path to a peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

Yet their achievement is only the first step of the journey. Now we need to make this turning point irreversible as we work with regional parties and the international community to make the benefits of peace irresistible. We must do our part. We must help the Israelis and the Palestinians implement the agreement. We must help to make it work. We must also build on it -- and cement it -- by playing an active role in the other bilateral talks to ensure progress on all fronts.

The Donors' Conference

We recognized that implementing the Israeli-Palestinian agreement would require resources to change the reality on the ground. We moved quickly. Together with our Russian co-sponsors, we organized a successful donors' conference. Forty-six countries and international organizations gathered to send the message that the peace talks must not fail. They agreed that to help transform the Declaration of Principles into an enduring agreement, the Palestinians needed to see the tangible benefits of peace. Living standards must be boosted, housing and infrastructure built, and the basis for sustained long-term growth established.

Conference participants pledged more than \$600 million in aid for the first year covered by the Declaration of Principles, \$1 billion for the first two years, and almost \$2 billion for the five-year period covered by the agreement.

That was an exceptional day's work. But our task is far from complete. The donors must now put in place the structure agreed to at the conference for distributing the aid and targeting it effectively. Palestinians and Israelis must create suitable mechanisms for absorbing this aid efficiently and for using it credibly. This is essential. And trade and private investment must be encouraged through export-financing programs and investment incentives.

The Negotiations: An Update

Through the donors' conference, the international community is doing its part for Israeli-Palestinian peace. But the lion's share of responsibility -- as with the credit for the breakthrough -- rests with the parties themselves. The Declaration of Principles established an ambitious set of objectives toward which the parties must work. Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat took up this work in an October 6, 1993, meeting in Cairo. On October 13, 1993, the day the Declaration of Principles entered into force, Shimon Peres and Abu Mazen met, and the work of the joint Israeli-Palestinian liaison committee got off to a very good start. The Gaza-Jericho committee, meeting in Taba, also

had very serious and practical discussions.

The Declaration of Principles must be transformed into an enduring agreement and the realities on the ground changed. We have been asked by the Israelis and the Palestinians to help as they move down this path of cooperation, and we will continue to play an active role on other tracks as well. We expected that the Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough would stimulate progress elsewhere in the bilaterals. We were not disappointed. Within twenty-four hours of the signing of the Declaration of Principles, the Israelis and the Jordanians initiated a substantive agenda for their negotiations.

Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan and Israeli Foreign Minister Peres met with President Clinton on October 1, 1993, to announce the creation of a joint economic committee. In addition, the president proposed and the parties agreed to create a U.S.-Israeli-Jordanian working group to identify and promote economic projects that would benefit both Israel and Jordan. This is another first -- a trilateral working group that will make cooperation and joint economic projects a normal part of the landscape.

Now we hope to make tangible progress on the other bilateral tracks. We recognize that there are complex issues on the Israeli-Syrian track. The parties continue to differ over key questions such as withdrawal, peace, and security. While they are working on a declaration of principles, they still have some distance to travel to overcome the gaps that separate them. In my recent talks with Foreign Minister Shara', he made it clear that he and President Assad remain firmly committed to the talks and to the process. He also made it clear that Syria, like Israel, welcomes our assistance in the talks. We will work to bridge the gaps.

Similarly, Israel and Lebanon are trying to reach agreement on a negotiating frame of reference that would enable them to make arrangements for security talks. We are encouraging them to agree to a joint security committee. We believe that would be an important step forward.

The Clinton administration will do all we can to help implement the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles. We will work very actively to promote progress in the other bilateral and multilateral negotiations. That is why I am dispatching Dennis Ross to the region this weekend, and why I expect to return to the region in the near future. As I said, we must make the breakthrough irreversible. That is the central challenge for the Israelis and the Palestinians, and for those of us committed to making the Middle East peace a reality.

The Challenges Ahead

We have no illusions about the difficulties we will continue to face. We must widen the circle of peace. We must isolate the forces of violence and hatred -- whether they are trying to disrupt the search for peace in the region, destabilize their neighbors through aggression, or to destroy innocent lives through terrorism.

Containing and diminishing the influence of political extremism -- secular and religious -- is essential. To do so, we must address the social and economic conditions that spawn extremist movements. And we must also take vigorous action to punish and isolate terrorist groups and those states that support terrorism. The UN embargo on Libya for its role in the bombing of Pan Am 103 and UTA 772 is a clear reminder of the strong stance taken by the United States and the international community against state-sponsored terrorism.

A related challenge stems from the flow of weapons into the area. The place to start is containing the rogue regimes in Iran, Iraq, and Libya to make certain that they cannot obtain sensitive technology.

Yet not all the tasks ahead place us in a defensive posture, seeking to limit or roll back regional dangers. Clearly, there are extraordinary opportunities to expand the horizon for productive and creative interaction -- breaking old taboos -- among the peoples of the Middle East.

The exciting fact is that taboos are being broken down every week. In the multilateral working groups, Israelis and

their counterparts from twelve Arab countries are taking on issues of mutual interest regarding arms control, the environment, economic development, and refugees. The arms control working group can and should be a forum where a new basis for regional security is developed. Confidence-building measures can reduce suspicions and create a basis for far more meaningful arms control steps. The refugee working group met this week in Tunis and helped establish another important milestone -- the first time a working group has convened right in the region. We must create other such milestones and make them normal and routine.

We must overcome and remove continuing barriers to reconciliation and cooperation. First and foremost, the scope of economic interaction must expand in the region. That is why the president and I felt so strongly about establishing the U.S.-Jordanian-Israeli working group. The countries of the Middle East share many problems and advantages; all would gain from economic integration.

A critical step toward this must be an end to the Arab boycott. The Israelis have made a major gesture. The Arab world must now reciprocate. In light of the latest advances in the peace process, the boycott is an anachronism. It punishes Palestinians and Israelis alike. As I have said repeatedly, in public and in private, the boycott is a relic of the past. It should be relegated to the dustbin of history -- now.

In light of the breakthrough last month, we are already seeing reports of contacts between Arab and Israeli businessmen and women -- and even the establishment of joint ventures that will accompany the achievement of peace. These are the kinds of cooperation that will cement the peace and make it last.

We have a full agenda for the Middle East, an agenda with peace-making and peace-building at its core. With the historic agreement in September, there is no excuse for a Middle East mired in the past. The excuses that have stood in the way of peace and have robbed the region of a better future are gone.

Now we must work with the optimism that these historic circumstances inspire and with the urgency that they demand. The developments of the last few weeks in Israel's negotiations with the Palestinians and the Jordanians are both a cause for hope and a spur to action. Those developments have enabled us to catch a glimpse of a new Middle East -- enjoying peace, reconciliation, cooperation, and prosperity.

As we look to a new century, we can see a very different future -- a far brighter future -- for the Middle East. As President Clinton said:

Together let us imagine what can be accomplished if all the energy and the ability the Israelis and the Palestinians have invested into...struggle can now be channeled into cultivating the land and freshening the water, into ending the boycotts and creating new industry, into building a land as bountiful and peaceful as it is holy.¹

Working with the parties, we will do our best to make that vision a reality.

Notes:

¹President Bill Clinton. Speech at signing of Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles. Federal News Service, September 13, 1993.

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 \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

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

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