

# The Peace Process Needs Partners, Not Scapegoats

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## **Divisive approaches that emphasize conspiracy theories rather than hard facts will only push the Palestinians further away from their goal of statehood.**

**T**he surest way to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace is to address the substance of their disagreements. Sadly, in his recent column, "Explaining the Jewish Hold Over Palestine, in America," Marwan Bishara chooses to invoke ancient conspiracy canards rather than to deal with the facts at hand.

The facts are these:

First, the entire American public, and their democratically elected government, overwhelmingly support Israel -- by an historically high margin of 72 percent, according to the most recent Gallup poll. They do so because they rightly see in Israel a strong, stable, democratic, intensely pro-American, economically and technologically advanced, and strategically valuable ally -- not because of some imaginary kabal among the tiny minority (less than 2 percent) of American citizens who identify as Jews.

This solid American support for a strong and stable ally is all the more relevant today, when much of Israel's neighborhood is convulsed by the most brutal mass murder, political and economic chaos, and sectarian strife that has absolutely nothing at all to do with either Palestinians or Israelis. Moreover, the historical record demonstrates that, at least since the Arab oil embargo way back in 1973, the U.S. pays no tangible price at all, even among Arab countries, as a result of its support for Israel.

Second, the Palestinians, and no one else, are responsible for declining an opportunity to achieve statehood. The Palestinian Authority, first under Arafat in 2000 and then under Abbas in 2008, twice refused an Israeli offer of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza -- including East Jerusalem. Today's Netanyahu government is the first Likud-led government in Israel's history to confirm Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state.

Third, the entire territory of Gaza, which Israel voluntarily gave up in 2005, is controlled by Hamas -- a U.S.

designated terrorist organization, and one that vehemently rejects even the idea of peace with Israel. This is especially significant right now, because the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas, which supposedly desires peace with Israel, has just signed an official "unity" agreement with Hamas. So if the U.S. tilts toward Israel, this must have something to do with the fact that Israel clearly does want peace, while the Palestinians continue to send tragically mixed messages about whether they really do or not.

Bishara attempts to distract from these inconvenient facts by resorting to classic ethnic-baiting. He claims that he "personally" does not "look for who is a Jew and who isn't." Yet he quotes "one keen observer" as saying that the 2000 Camp David Summit "featured an American delegation that was comprised of only Jewish friends of Israel, with the exception of President Clinton." How is it, then, that it was precisely at this Camp David Summit that Israel first offered the Palestinians an independent state -- which, as President Clinton and others have since documented, the Palestinians rejected? While this sort of rhetorical smear may be acceptable elsewhere, it has no place in American discourse.

Of course Israel is not perfect, but Americans have correctly concluded that it firmly deserves U.S. support -- which also serves U.S. national interests. And of course the Palestinians deserve to obtain their legitimate national aspirations, side by side in peace with their Israeli neighbors. But Bishara's unseemly, divisive approach threatens to push the Palestinians further than ever away from that goal.

*David Pollock is the Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of Fikra Forum.* ❖

*Huffington Post*

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