

# Is Peace Still Possible?

## The Future of Israeli-Palestinian Relations

by [Isaac Herzog \(/experts/isaac-herzog\)](/experts/isaac-herzog)

Sep 19, 2008

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Isaac Herzog \(/experts/isaac-herzog\)](/experts/isaac-herzog)

Isaac Herzog is chairman of the executive at the Jewish Agency for Israel.

---



In-Depth Reports

**D**ownload (<templateC04.php?CID=300>) the complete proceedings.

On September 19, 2008, Isaac Herzog, Riad Malki, and Dennis Ross addressed The Washington Institute's annual Weinberg Founders Conference. Mr. Herzog serves as Israel's minister of welfare and social services as well as minister of the diaspora, society, and the fight against anti-Semitism. Mr. Malki serves as minister of foreign affairs, minister of justice, minister of information, and spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority. Ambassador Ross is an independent consultant to the Institute.

The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

Isaac Herzog

Peace between Israel and the Palestinians remains both necessary and possible. Negotiations are taking place on a regular basis, and they are progressing -- albeit slowly. But with the Iranian threat becoming more acute, it is more important than ever that the key parties -- namely, the moderate coalition at the November 2007 Annapolis Conference, including Israel, the Palestinians, the United States, and the Arab states -- must look toward their shared interests rather than their individual grievances in order to produce peace.

At the most fundamental level, the Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership refuses to budge on the issue of refugees, demanding partial right of return in addition to financial compensation. Moreover, it does not acknowledge Israel's significant step of limiting settlement construction to two blocs that would be transferred to Israel in the event of any peace agreement. With such an absence of cooperation at the top, the best way to create a stable foundation for peace is to encourage educational reforms that promote the principle of peace within Palestinian society.

Another problematic issue is Hamas, which remains in control of the Gaza Strip. It goes without saying that as long as the Palestinian territories are politically divided, an agreement is unattainable. The help of Arab governments could make a significant difference in resolving this issue. Through economic sanctions, Arab states have the capacity to pressure Hamas into cooperating with the PA and Israel.

Also, the thorny issue of Jerusalem lingers. Few observers see a solution on the horizon, but if one does materialize, the United States will undoubtedly be needed to broker any agreement regarding the city.

This is a time of uncertainty in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Given the transitions under way within the

Palestinian, Israeli, and American governments, no one can foresee the character of negotiations one year from now. The important point now is to move ahead, develop momentum, and establish the basis for a settlement in the future -- because without the foundation for peace, it will not matter who wins any of the upcoming elections.

Riad Malki

For some time now, Israel has been violating its commitments as set forth in the Quartet's 2003 Roadmap peace initiative: it has failed to remove roadblocks in the West Bank, refused to negotiate on Jerusalem, and, most important, continued its campaign of settlement construction. Although this campaign is limited to two blocs that will be transferred to Israel in the event of a final peace agreement, it has a negative effect on Palestinian psychology: Palestinians see ongoing construction as a sign that Israel simply no longer cares about resolving the dispute as it used to.

Generating trust between the PA and Israel is the first step on the path to symbiosis. Three factors can guide the relationship in that direction.

First, both parties must uphold all agreements, specifically the Roadmap and the 2007 principles formulated at the Annapolis Conference. Second, the PA needs to be strengthened, not weakened. Israel has done little to publicly praise the PA's security efforts, which is leading many Palestinians to favor the more radical Hamas government in Gaza. Moreover, the lack of overall progress delegitimizes the PA. Only when Palestinians see results will they consider Mahmoud Abbas the leader who can best realize their goals. Finally, all parties must be dedicated to reaching a solution, including Israel, the Arab countries, and the United States. Even the Palestinians could do more to show their commitment, particularly on issues of security, where there has been progress but no breakthrough.

Despite its qualms about Israeli behavior, the PA asserts its unwavering commitment to negotiations and the peace process. But the next five months are crucial. Accelerated discussions leading to progress would demonstrate the viability of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, whereas stagnation and uncooperativeness could crush any remaining hopes for a solution.

Dennis Ross

Israel and the Palestinians have two fundamentally different views regarding the current status of negotiations. The Israelis say there is progress and that both sides are taking steps toward an eventual agreement. The Palestinians, however, dispute that progress, arguing that Israel is negotiating with no intention of finalizing a solution.

Regardless, there are significant points of convergence between the two parties. The most important one concerns the threat of Iran. If Tehran eventually weaponizes its nuclear technology, it could derail the entire peace process. Although Israelis and Palestinians may view that process differently, both ultimately desire a peace agreement. Second, there is Gaza: The PA and Israel have a vested interest in addressing the Hamas issue together, and such action will be necessary at some point for any peace settlement to have legitimacy and permanence.

Long-term questions aside, both parties are capable of doing more at present. They need to respect agreements rather than make excuses for violating them. This is the only way to create the trust that each government will need in order to take leaps of faith when a permanent-status agreement is near. Moreover, when one party recognizes efforts by the other to encourage peaceful behavior, it should publicize its satisfaction in order to build momentum -- which will hopefully lead to peace. ❖

## BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

## TOPICS

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)

## REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)

Palestinians (/policy-analysis/palestinians)