

# Don't Play with Maps

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## Articles & Testimony

I became embroiled in a controversy with former President Jimmy Carter over the use of two maps in his recent book, "Palestine Peace Not Apartheid." While some criticized what appeared to be the misappropriation of maps I had commissioned for my book, "The Missing Peace," my concern was always different.

I was concerned less with where the maps had originally come from -- Mr. Carter has said that he used an atlas that was published after my book appeared -- and more with how they were labeled. To my mind, Mr. Carter's presentation badly misrepresents the Middle East proposals advanced by President Bill Clinton in 2000, and in so doing undermines, in a small but important way, efforts to bring peace to the region.

In his book, Mr. Carter juxtaposes two maps labeled the "Palestinian Interpretation of Clinton's Proposal 2000" and "Israeli Interpretation of Clinton's Proposal 2000."

The problem is that the "Palestinian interpretation" is actually taken from an Israeli map presented during the Camp David summit meeting in July 2000, while the "Israeli interpretation" is an approximation of what President Clinton subsequently proposed in December of that year. Without knowing this, the reader is left to conclude that the Clinton proposals must have been so ambiguous and unfair that Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader, was justified in rejecting them. But that is simply untrue.

In actuality, President Clinton offered two different proposals at two different times. In July, he offered a partial proposal on territory and control of Jerusalem. Five months later, at the request of Ehud Barak, the Israeli prime minister, and Mr. Arafat, Mr. Clinton presented a comprehensive proposal on borders, Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and security. The December proposals became known as the Clinton ideas or parameters.

Put simply, the Clinton parameters would have produced an independent Palestinian state with 100 percent of Gaza, roughly 97 percent of the West Bank and an elevated train or highway to connect them. Jerusalem's status would have been guided by the principle that what is currently Jewish will be Israeli and what is currently Arab will be Palestinian, meaning that Jewish Jerusalem -- East and West -- would be united, while Arab East Jerusalem would become the capital of the Palestinian state.

The Palestinian state would have been "nonmilitarized," with internal security forces but no army and an

international military presence led by the United States to prevent terrorist infiltration and smuggling. Palestinian refugees would have had the right of return to their state, but not to Israel, and a fund of \$30 billion would have been created to compensate those refugees who chose not to exercise their right of return to the Palestinian state.

When I decided to write the story of what had happened in the negotiations, I commissioned maps to illustrate what the proposals would have meant for a prospective Palestinian state. If the Clinton proposals in December 2000 had been Israeli or Palestinian ideas and I was interpreting them, others could certainly question my interpretation. But they were American ideas, created at the request of the Palestinians and the Israelis, and I was the principal author of them. I know what they were and so do the parties.

It is certainly legitimate to debate whether President Clinton's proposal could have settled the conflict. It is not legitimate, however, to rewrite history and misrepresent what the Clinton ideas were.

Indeed, since the talks fell apart, there has emerged a mythology that seeks to defend Mr. Arafat's rejection of the Clinton ideas by suggesting they weren't real or they were too vague or that Palestinians would have received far less than what had been advertised. Mr. Arafat himself tried to defend his rejection of the Clinton proposals by later saying he was not offered even 90 percent of the West Bank or any of East Jerusalem. But that was myth, not reality.

Why is it important to set the record straight? Nothing has done more to perpetuate the conflict between Arabs and Israelis than the mythologies on each side. The mythologies about who is responsible for the conflict (and about its core issues) have taken on a life of their own. They shape perception. They allow each side to blame the other while avoiding the need to face up to its own mistakes. So long as myths are perpetuated, no one will have to face reality.

And yet peace can never be built on these myths. Instead it can come only once the two sides accept and adjust to reality. Perpetuating a myth about what was offered to justify the Arafat rejection serves neither Palestinian interests nor the cause of peace.

I would go a step further. If, as I believe, the Clinton ideas embody the basic trade-offs that will be required in any peace deal, it is essential to understand them for what they were and not to misrepresent them. This is especially true now that the Bush administration, for the first time, seems to be contemplating a serious effort to deal with the core issues of the conflict.

Of course, one might ask if trying to address the core issues is appropriate at a moment when Palestinians are locked in an internal stalemate and the Israeli public lacks confidence in its government. Can politically weak leaders make compromises on the issues that go to the heart of the conflict? Can the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, compromise on the right of return and tell his public that refugees will not go back to Israel? Can Israel's prime minister, Ehud Olmert, tell his public that demography and practicality mean that the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem will have Palestinian and not Israeli sovereignty?

The basic trade-offs require meeting Israeli needs on security and refugees on the one hand and Palestinian needs on territory and a capital in Arab East Jerusalem on the other. But producing such trade-offs won't simply come from calling for them. Instead, an environment must be created in which each side believes the other can act on peace and is willing to condition its public for the difficult compromises that will be necessary.

So long as mythologies can't be cast aside, and so long as the trade-offs on the core issues can't be embraced by Israelis or Palestinians, peace will remain forever on the horizon. If history tells us anything, it is that for peace-making to work, it must proceed on the basis of fact, not fiction.

Dennis Ross, envoy to the Middle East in the Clinton administration, is counselor of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. ❖

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