

# After Disengagement: Opportunities for the Future

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### Brief Analysis

On September 13, 2005, Israeli deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs Silvan Shalom addressed The Washington Institute's Board of Trustees in New York. Following is the full text of his prepared remarks.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, I would like to thank Rob Satloff and The Washington Institute for giving me the opportunity to address this prestigious forum.

Whereas it is the journalist's creed to hold truth to power, it is the Institute's role to give power to the truth—a responsibility no less important. Particularly in an age of information overload on the one hand, and mass media on the other, the importance of studying and telling things as they are, is greater than ever.

The belief that scholarship can have an impact on the making of U.S. policy in the Middle East has been proven by this institute, time and again. Successive administrations have come to respect your work and heed its relevance. In short, you make a difference, and it is an honor to be here with you this evening.

As you all know, Israel this week completed its disengagement from Gaza and from areas of the northern West Bank. Responsibility for these areas has been handed over to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Implementing this plan has been a traumatic and difficult experience for Israel. Families have been uprooted, some of them for the second time, while children and parents have been forced to leave behind the graves of their loved ones. Thriving businesses have been shut down and investments discarded.

The public debate in Israel over this matter—as you all know—has been emotional and intense, with considerable political fallout, the full extent of which none of us yet knows. And yet the government's decision was implemented to the letter, proving the resolve of our leadership and the overwhelming strength of our democracy.

Responsibility for the affairs of Gaza and its residents is now in Palestinian hands. Israel is transferring to the PA the infrastructures which served the Israeli communities there, including water, electricity, and public buildings.

Israel has expressed its strong support for international aid and assistance for the social and economic development of Gaza, and we are committed to facilitate these efforts. We wish to see arrangements for the passage of people and merchandise to and from Gaza in a manner which will benefit the local population without posing a security threat to Israel.

Friends, the transfer of authority and control of all of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority provides the Palestinian side

with an unprecedented opportunity to take their fate into their own hands and build a functioning, democratic and peaceful society. They must seize this opportunity.

Gaza—we hope—will serve as a model of how the Palestinian Authority is able to govern, and to bring real economic progress, calm, order, and hope, to its people.

For this to happen—for the opportunities created by disengagement to be realized—Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) must take concrete steps now to establish his full authority and to ensure that the armed militias are not allowed to undermine cooperation and progress, as they have in the past.

He must act to translate his declared commitment to the principle of “one authority, one gun” into practice. This is Israel’s demand, and it must be the demand of the international community as well.

As in other areas of Palestinian life, it is now up to Abu Mazen to deliver. The Roadmap clearly lays out what he must do—confiscate illegal weapons, deploy forces, and dismantle the terrorist infrastructures. The PA cannot nurture aspirations of self-determination and at the same time allow armed militias to rule the streets.

Israel’s disengagement from Gaza must now be followed by Palestinian disengagement from terror and the organizations which promote it. If Gaza is indeed to be the positive model we all wish to see, then it is the narrative of dialogue, and not that of violence, that must prevail.

This is particularly urgent now, in the leadup to the elections for the Palestinian legislative assembly in January. Hamas—an organization dedicated to terror and the destruction of the State of Israel—is seeking to participate in these elections even as it continues its preparations for more terror.

But Hamas does not only threaten Israel. It also poses a real threat to the very existence of the Palestinian Authority. It is an organization that seeks to supplant both Israel and the Palestinian Authority with an alternative, theocratic system of government.

This is why we call on the international community to remain resolute in its opposition to the inclusion of Hamas in the forthcoming Palestinian elections. There is no place—nor can there ever be—in a democratic society for political parties which bear arms, for political parties engaged in terrorism and intimidation.

No democratic regime can survive if it lets terrorism and politics proceed side by side.

Looking beyond the Palestinian context, it is of course true that the collective interest in empowering the moderates and isolating the extremists is applicable across the entire Middle East. Moreover, it is clear that there is now opportunity for positive change in this direction.

American actions in Afghanistan and in Iraq have set off nothing short of an earthquake of change and opportunity in the Arab and Muslim world. It will take decades before we can evaluate the full effects of these efforts, but results are beginning to appear already.

Elections in Iraq, the PA, Lebanon, and just last week in Egypt, are all the result of America's determination to help set our region on a different, better course. As the drive for democracy begins to take root, the pendulum is swinging in favour of the forces of moderation.

Israel’s relations with key Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan are reflecting this swing, once again moving in the direction of greater cooperation. Contacts with other Arab countries are also growing, and the prime minister and I will be using this week here in New York to promote such contacts further.

I have been leading an effort to build a Roadmap to the Arab and Muslim world, towards regional dialogue and cooperation. Two weeks ago, I met my colleague, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, for the first time. Pakistan is the second largest Muslim country in the world.

As a result of the courage shown by Pakistani President Musharraf, we are now on our way towards normalizing our relations. Significantly, our meeting took place in another Muslim country, Turkey, with which Israel has a strategic relationship of many years' standing.

And there are good reasons to believe that this trend will continue. I expect that in the near future we will see more such steps of reconciliation and openness between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world.

Normalization of relations with our neighbors will of course have welcome impact on both regional stability and economic opportunities throughout the region. It will help build up constituencies for peace across the region, strengthening Arab and Israeli public opinion in favor of further advances in the peace process.

Ultimately, it is the ordinary citizens of the region who will benefit most from the collective effort, to wrest the regional agenda back away from the despots and the terrorists.

At the same time that we work to reinforce the moderates, we must always remain vigilant in the battle against the enemies of peace. The pressure must be kept up on those regimes that still seek to cling to the old order of suppression at home and aggression abroad.

First among these is Assad's Syria. Thanks to American as well as French and European pressure, Syria earlier this year withdrew its military from Lebanon. But we have yet to see any evidence from Assad that he actually understands the shift in the international agenda.

His policies remain as destabilizing and dangerous as before. This is why international pressure must continue, until Syria stops its support for the insurgents in Iraq, stops its support to Hizballah, and stops giving shelter to radical terror organizations.

Assad has shown that he reacts to pressure. We must therefore maintain the pressure at maximum intensity, until the necessary changes come.

UN Security Council Resolution 1559 also demands the dismantling of all armed militias in Lebanon. And yet, Hizballah refuses to disarm, using the baseless excuse that Israel still occupies parts of Lebanon, or threatens that country's integrity. In fact, it is Hizballah which threatens the integrity of the Lebanese state.

Placing this organization where it belongs—on the global terrorist list—is one of Israel's key priorities at this time. Removing Hizballah terrorism from the equation will have a profound and positive impact both on Lebanese politics itself and on the prospects for peace on Israel's northern border.

Iran continues to be the source of greatest immediate concern. As the recent election results show, Iran's Islamic revolutionary goals remain unchanged, as do the destabilizing means it has employed for decades.

Iran's interference in Palestinian and Lebanese affairs, through its proxies, is a central source of instability in our region. Now, through its secret nuclear weapons program, Iran today seeks to arm its extremist ideology with a doomsday weapon.

The coupling of Iranian-backed terror groups and Iranian-built nuclear devices is a global nightmare. The entire international community now faces a severe test of resolve.

Israel remains convinced—like the United States—that Iran's clandestine nuclear weapons program requires Security Council intervention. The IAEA needs some muscle, and the only way to provide it is through the Security Council.

This issue will be at the very top of our discussions here in New York this week, as we seek to encourage key members of the international community to take a stand before the nightmare becomes reality.

Friends, the focus of this year's UN General Assembly is the question of reform.

Israel, like the UN, was established at least in part as an answer to the human calamity of World War Two and the Holocaust. We share the desire to see the UN return to the universal vision of its founders. As the UN contemplates reform in its institutions, so it must also reform its attitude toward Israel.

Israel remains the only country in the world denied proper membership of any UN geographical group. Israeli officials still cannot be elected to all UN organizations, and Israel is not presently allowed to serve on the Security Council. Israel is the only country in the world that is the object of a yearly series of automatic condemnations by the UN.

Israel looks to all those who seek to make the UN a more effective organization to help end these anomalies, and to grant Israel the rights and opportunities it deserves.

Such steps will not only normalize Israel's standing in the UN, but will contribute greatly to our effort to normalize the Middle East.

Friends, allow me to conclude my remarks with the observation that the battle for the soul of the Middle East—and with it, for the safety of the international community—is being fought every day.

As a result of the courageous leadership and resolve displayed by the United States and its allies, change is afoot. The moderates and the democrats are having their say.

Israel's disengagement from Gaza has helped create conditions on the Palestinian side which, I believe, offer the Palestinians a real opportunity to build a better future for their people and ours.

The effort to translate this potential into reality must be a collective one, and it must take place here at the UN in New York and in the corridors of power across the globe.

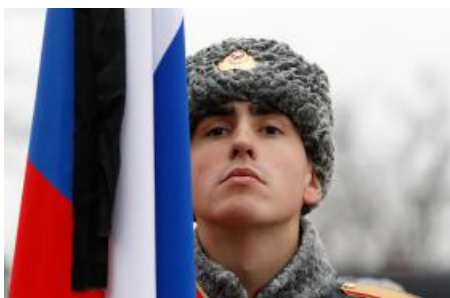
Israel—for its part, as it has shown—is ready to do its share with courage and bravery



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