

Twentieth Anniversary Soref Symposium:

From the Beirut Spring to the Gaza Summer: The Future of Arab-Israeli Relations

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In-Depth Reports

On May 20, 2005, Hassan Abu Libdeh, David Makovsky, Terje Roed-Larsen, and Ehud Yaari addressed The Washington Institute's Soref Symposium. Hassan Abu Libdeh is the Palestinian Authority (PA) minister of labor and social affairs. Previously, he served as secretary of the PA cabinet and chief of staff to Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei. David Makovsky is a senior fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute. His most recent publications include two Institute monographs: *Engagement through Disengagement: Gaza and the Potential for Renewed Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking* (2005) and *A Defensible Fence: Fighting Terror and Enabling a Two-State Solution* (2004). Terje Roed-Larsen is the UN secretary-general's special representative for Lebanon and president of the International Peace Academy. Previously, he served as UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process. Ehud Yaari is chief Middle East correspondent for Israel's Channel Two, associate editor of the *Jerusalem Report*, and an Israel-based associate of The Washington Institute. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

Hassan Abu Libdeh

As the current window of opportunity on the Palestinian-Israeli front opens, actions taken by both parties will lead to either a resumption of the peace process or an escalation of the violence that has plagued them for four years. If the former scenario is to unfold, Israel's planned disengagement from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank must be tied to the Quartet Roadmap and followed up with increased Palestinian-Israeli coordination. The alternative -- Israel using the disengagement as an excuse to postpone final-status talks and enlarge its West Bank settlements -- is impermissible and should be prevented by a third party. If Israel is in fact serious about withdrawing from the northern West Bank, it should disengage from an additional four settlements there and hand Jenin over to the

Palestinian Authority, which could seize control of the city from the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades within twenty-four hours.

A third party is also necessary to remind Arab states of their commitments to the Palestinian people dating to the 2002 Arab League summit in Beirut. By funding crucial labor-intensive construction projects, Arab states could show Palestinians that they will be able to flourish economically following Israeli disengagement. If Palestinians lack the ability to succeed financially, support for Hamas will continue to grow.

Despite Hamas's recent electoral successes and the difficult elections to come, Fatah remains on the playing field. The ceasefire has strengthened Palestinian centrists, and sustaining it will renew hope for resuming the peace process and improving daily life. Democracy is not sufficient to ensure security and calm; statehood and independence are also necessary. To further these goals, the social safety net must be significantly strengthened in order to shore up support for the peace process.

David Makovsky

The intifada shattered trust between Israelis and Palestinians and radicalized the center. This broad center must be reconstituted if future negotiations are to succeed. The Gaza disengagement can be viewed as a step in that direction, as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon -- one of the fathers of the settlement movement -- takes concrete actions that will undo previous Israeli policy. The Israeli political scene may be reconfigured in a manner that reinforces a broad center if Sharon and his allies break away from the Likud Party to form a new faction with Labor Party leaders.

In the wake of the Gaza disengagement, any such centrist faction would face the challenge of determining the West Bank's future. Israeli political debate regarding the territory has already undergone significant moderation, with various factions calling for Israel to retain far smaller proportions of West Bank land than they had in the past.

On the Palestinian side, President Mahmoud Abbas is a far better peace partner than his predecessor, Yasser Arafat. Recent polling has demonstrated that the Palestinians understand this. Accordingly, a third party should help Abbas on the security front, which would in turn facilitate international efforts to help him on the economic front. Both of these efforts would help the Palestinian Authority displace Hamas as the principal provider of social services in the territories.

Following disengagement, three options for the peace process will present themselves. First, Israelis and Palestinians could decide that unilateralism is acceptable and move forward on their own. Second, they could choose to return to the framework of the Quartet Roadmap. In that case, Sharon would insist that Palestinians implement the first-phase requirement of dismantling terrorist infrastructure. Third, the parties could opt for a new internationally sponsored peace blueprint that lays out final-status details. One example would be an Arab "roadmap" in which Arab states make successive moves toward recognizing Israel based on its progress with the Palestinians.

Terje Roed-Larsen

The main challenge in Lebanon and the West Bank-Gaza is the same: the need to stabilize a single, independent government. In Lebanon, elections must be carried out on time and in a fair manner. Meeting the former requirement became much less difficult once the Syrian military withdrew. Syria was also asked to withdraw its intelligence services, and by and large it seems to have acceded to this request. As for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, they were never officially in Lebanon. A UN military verification team is currently working on the ground to ensure that all remaining foreign troops have left. Now the challenge is to disarm the remaining forces within Lebanon.

In the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinians must streamline their security services and relegitimize the prospect of

negotiations. Following a coordinated Israeli disengagement from Gaza, the only viable option is to quickly reactivate the peace process. Ariel Sharon has taken radical steps that go farther than any of his predecessors. His next step must be to initiate permanent-status negotiations. Awareness of the dire consequences of failure should keep all of the players actively involved in sustaining such negotiations.

The peace process would also benefit from an end to Israeli occupation and the quick creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders. A state with such borders is not impracticable; after all, Israel has lived without firm borders for decades.

Ehud Yaari

Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis want to implement the Quartet Roadmap as it is currently written.

Mahmoud Abbas wants to bypass the first two phases of the plan and move directly to phase three. For his part, Ariel Sharon hopes to skip phase one in order to establish a long-term interim arrangement that includes the creation of a Palestinian ministate centered in Gaza.

Yet, the period following disengagement will bring mixed results for both parties. Sharon will learn that he cannot hold on to the entire West Bank, while the Palestinians will have their hands full trying to govern their new mini-state. Unwilling to accept blame for any deterioration in Gaza, Israel may even open one of the territory's borders -- a major departure from the intentions of former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. As a result of its unilateralism, Israel is ceding land for nothing and has already permitted the remilitarization of Gaza. This lesson will not be lost on the Palestinians.

Moreover, the Israeli elite remain divided on how they should approach Abbas and Fatah. This fissure became particularly noticeable with the dismissal of Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Moshe Yaalon. Meanwhile, Palestinians face the prospect of a two-headed state, with the Palestinian Authority disavowing armed resistance and Hamas perpetuating it. Hamas scored several key victories during the recent municipal elections and will likely capture 30 to 40 percent of the seats in the upcoming legislative elections.

All of these factors point to the same solution: the creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders, as outlined in the second phase of the Roadmap. Israel's main priority is obtaining security guarantees. By agreeing to a Palestinian state with conditional borders relatively soon -- that is, before this option becomes impossible -- Israel can also realize its own goals.

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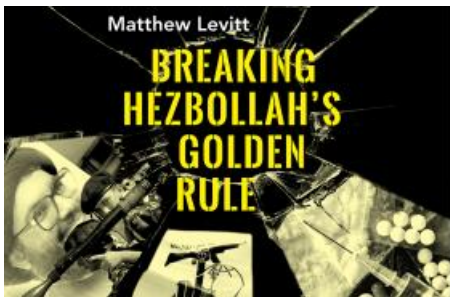
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