

New Hope for the Holy Land

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

Mar 20, 2005

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



Articles & Testimony

After years of terror and violence, the recent changes in the Palestinian leadership and a new Israeli policy supported by a broad parliamentary coalition suggest a window of opportunity to make progress between Israelis and Palestinians in 2005. Diplomatic engagement on a defined agenda could in the short term restore trust and enable both peoples to re-affirm their faith in the very enterprise of peacemaking.

An important beginning would be focusing on restoring calm, creating a set of confidence-building measures, and enabling Israel's exit from Gaza. Therefore, the first year of the post-Arafat period will be critical. It will determine whether trust can be restored between the peoples or alternatively, whether this historic opportunity will be missed. Successful withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank would shatter old taboos that have been in place since 1967 and therefore facilitate further withdrawals, reinvigorate the peace process and revive a shattered partnership. A coordinated pullout from Gaza also could embolden moderates within each camp at the expense of extremists.

The United States should focus its immediate energies and resources on helping coordinate this major endeavor. This should be done for two reasons. The success or failure of Gaza withdrawal will shape perceptions on both sides about the prospects of future peacemaking. Success would likely mobilize the publics on both sides to press their leaders to move further. In contrast, failure would shape expectations in a negative direction. In short, much is riding on the Gaza effort. Failure to seize this opening is likely to condemn these peoples to further violence and despair.

The success of Gaza withdrawal should be the main focal point of U.S. foreign policy toward Israelis and Palestinians over the next few months. Any U.S. final status blueprint put forward before Gaza withdrawal is likely to upset this favorable dynamic. Such a blueprint at this moment is not likely to empower the leaders, but energize their hard-line critics who will seize on any idea of compromise. Mahmoud Abbas may be elected, but he does not yet have the authority to veer from the Arafat legacy on final status. Taken together, the idea of a blueprint should not be put forward at this time.

In the aftermath of Gaza withdrawal, this idea may be considered. However, the guiding criteria should be whether such an American-led effort has a chance of success and not if it possibly engenders ephemeral sympathy in the Arab world. The criteria for success depend on the outcome of the Gaza withdrawal and the willingness of key Arab states to visibly come out in support of explicit compromise on contentious issues such as refugees and Jerusalem. If they do not provide Abbas with political cover, there is little chance that he can veer from the Arafat legacy. Coming out with a blueprint without broad Arab support would guarantee failure and likely trigger further violence. The United States should not just ask the parties whether they are ready to proceed to final status, but should require both sides to provide tangible evidence in public that they are willing to engage in compromises. This would be an important tell-tale sign that the sides are serious.

Given the past, the United States cannot afford to fail. The effort in 2000, whereby the United States put forward its own parameters, did not generate sympathy for this nation in the Arab world since it was overwhelmed by violence on the ground. A peace agreement may engender sympathy but a U.S. blueprint, which lacks support, is not likely to provide the United States with any traction, and is likely to even be counterproductive.

Although a final status agreement is not possible now, there are important steps that the United States can take, including formally activating the first phase of the road map. This would demonstrate that American involvement in Gaza is part of a wider context, and does not exist in isolation.

Quick progress on the Palestinian front is the best way to warm Israel's relations with the Arab world. There have been some indications that in the aftermath of a Sharon-Abbas meeting, Egypt and Jordan may return their ambassadors to Tel Aviv after a four and one-half year absence. This should be followed quickly by the reopening of the quasi-diplomatic liaison offices in the Arab world and Israel that were closed in 2000.

The United States cannot substitute for the parties but it can help them in many tangible ways.

There are several other steps that the Bush administration can take in 2005 to stabilize Israeli-Palestinian relations after years of turbulence. They include:

Revive Israeli-Palestinian security coordination.

Hold the parties accountable for their commitments.

Help the Palestinian Authority as it reforms its security services and assist Israel's military as it redeploys from Gaza.

Use leverage against rejectionists.

Reactivate the road map.

Find ways to ensure that an Israeli pullout from Gaza is complete, but does not leave Israel vulnerable on security.

Support sound economic development and assistance programs for a post-withdrawal Gaza.

Urge Arab states to assist the Palestinians and take positive steps toward Israel as it moves forward on peace.

Put forward a new United Nations Security Council resolution ratifying Gaza withdrawal.

Makovsky is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and directs WINEP's Project on the Middle East Peace Process. An award-winning journalist and frequent television commentator, he has authored numerous books and essays on U.S.-Israel relations. ❖

San Diego Union-Tribune

RECOMMENDED

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 \(/policy-analysis/palestinians\)](#)