

The Missing Peace:

A Conversation on Middle East Peacemaking

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

Before peace can be initiated, Israel, the Arab world, and the Palestinians must undergo a change in behavior and, in the case of the latter, find new, legitimate leadership. The Clinton administration was correct to put Yasser Arafat to the test in 2000. During the Camp David talks, even the Palestinian negotiators grew weary of Arafat, and neither Israel nor the United States was mistaken in attempting to reach out to them. At the time, Arafat was both entitled and obligated to make decisions regarding the size of the new Palestinian state. Yet, he was not capable of making decisions about the holy places, in part because he did not have sole responsibility for those sites. The United States should have understood the need to involve Saudi Arabia earlier on in this decisionmaking process. In any case, there will never be peace with Arafat because he depends on his "super victim" status. He thrives on seeing CNN broadcast images of him waving to the schoolchildren who cheered him on as he was quarantined by Israel. The Bush administration erred in failing to pick up on the subtle internal marginalization of Arafat; Washington should have let the Palestinian reformers push him aside and give him higher, nonfunctional role. Moreover, the Bush administration should not have dismantled the Middle East peace team when it was so close to an agreement. The Clinton administration erred in not pushing democratization issues in the Middle East. Yet, the current Broader Middle East Initiative will not succeed because it is an American imposition. The parties must initiate peace negotiations themselves, and Middle Eastern leaders must condition their societies for peace. Ehud Barak and Binyamin Netanyahu did in fact condition their people for peace, but Arafat never did so.

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The first step in initiating a dialogue toward peace is to stop the violence. There can be no dialogue amid constant attacks and retaliations. At the same time, without dialogue, there can be only a short-term calm punctuated by explosions. Second, Palestinians and Israelis must abandon their cherished mythologies. As each side recognizes its own requirements, each must also acknowledge the other side's needs before a peace deal can be negotiated. This includes abandoning their sincere sense of grievance, which has consumed both of them. Currently, neither party is able to identify with the other's needs. Israelis and Palestinians alike desire peace, but they both believe that they lack a partner. It is imperative that the Palestinians and neighboring Arab nations recognize Israel's right to exist. At

the same time, Israelis must understand that they can no longer dictate internal Palestinian affairs. All in all, once myths are exposed on both sides, behavior can be adjusted. After a dialogue has been established, a foundation for peace can be erected.

Toward this end, all parties involved must learn lessons from the last round of the peace process:

Arab leaders. Arab leaders must publicly accept the moral legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state. If they do not, they will be unable to justify making the compromises with Israel that are essential for peace. If Arab governments offer only de facto acceptance of Israel's existence, then the Arab world will continue to regard the state as a transient entity and deem violence against it as legitimate. Arab leaders must also discredit terrorism as a negotiating tactic. It is important to avoid the mistakes of the past, when the United States gave Arab leaders too much leeway on this issue. Today, that which is said in private about accepting Israel's existence must be said publicly as well.

Israel. Israel must help the Palestinians toward statehood by rescinding its control over Palestinian life. This means the proposed Gaza withdrawal must be carried out very carefully. In the past, Israel controlled Palestinian life in ways that were unrelated to security (e.g., with measures related to economic issues, such as the export of Palestinian goods to maintain protectionist policies). If Israel retains this sort of control over the Palestinians, their resentment, anger, and alienation will continue to grow. The Gaza withdrawal is a significant opportunity for the Palestinians to prove themselves, and Israel must take actions that will strengthen the influence of positive elements in Palestinian society.

Palestinians. The Palestinians must renounce the use of terrorism as a political tool. This will influence current Israeli policy, which is primarily concerned with the security of the Israeli people. If terrorism did not occur, there would be a Palestinian state today. Moreover, the Palestinians must present a positive political framework that outlines what they stand for, not just what they are against.

Palestinians must also abandon the legacy of victimhood. Arafat thrives on this dynamic, viewing it not just as a condition, but as a strategy. Victimhood creates a sense of entitlement, with no accountability. Every defeat is a victory for Arafat because he survives, and with every survival comes the opportunity to blame others for his failures. Arafat is interested only in maintaining his status. Peace is a losing proposition for him because it would rob him of his accustomed position as a victim. Accordingly, Arafat has lied about what concessions he was offered during the Camp David talks of 2000. I wrote *The Missing Peace* in part to debunk the mythologies that he has propagated.

If Palestinians are to have a chance at statehood, Arafat's destructive influence must be separated from the overlapping Palestinian security organizations. A clear chain of command is needed.

The United States. Washington needs to be more engaged in the Arab-Israeli arena than it has been over the past four years. The United States must be more than a facilitator of negotiations. This means taking the lead when there are no negotiations and serving as a bridge at a time of violence. Yet, the ideas that will ensure peace must come from the Palestinians and Israelis themselves. Only when they have invested in the idea of peace will they fight for it. An imposed agreement will never be accepted because neither side will own it. Neither side will be willing to make sacrifices and fight internal enemies for such a peace plan.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Andrew Eastman.

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