

Between Jerusalem and Ramallah: Inside Israeli and Palestinian Politics

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Sep 19, 2003

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In-Depth Reports

Shibley Telhami, University of Maryland: I am going to paint a very pessimistic picture, starting with the strategic reasons why we are in a worse crisis than we may even realize. First, we have been distracted by our focus on personalities. Yasir Arafat is an easy target, and he certainly owns a good share of the blame. But the reality is that, Arafat or no Arafat, there is a strategic problem with the Quartet's Roadmap to Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Roadmap has serious flaws that make it unrealistic unless there is a third party fully determined to implement it -- with iron fists holding the hands of both parties every step of the way. I see no such party. Let me explain just two of the Roadmap's major contradictions that are insurmountable without an external actor to create momentum.

One is the Roadmap's incentive structure. Put Arafat and his objectives aside. In the case of Hamas, the Roadmap asks it to commit suicide voluntarily. It does not just call on Hamas to cease certain actions. It does not just call on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to disarm Hamas, but rather to dismember it entirely -- the social and the military components. It is a very strange kind of thing to require, and I do not see how, ultimately, Hamas would cooperate in bringing about its own demise.

A second flaw relates to the Israeli side. The Roadmap envisions a final settlement in two years. How is it possible to reconcile that timeframe with the position of the Sharon government? Optimists say Prime Minister Ariel Sharon no longer believes Israel ought to hold onto all of the West Bank. They say that he has accepted the notion of a partial Palestinian state. But no one I know believes he has made the leap into anything close to what the Palestinians would accept in a final settlement. Sharon's acceptance of the Roadmap was essentially a reluctance to say no to President George W. Bush, and the degree of Israeli cooperation is still a function of the extent to which the United States is involved. This makes the process entirely dependent on American engagement.

Even under the ideal circumstances in which both parties want to move forward, the Roadmap suffers from a structural barrier. The Israelis, no matter what Yasir Arafat says or does, will not trust the Palestinians. And the Palestinians will never trust the promises of Sharon. It is as simple as that. There is a psychology of mistrust. The Roadmap calls for each party to implement Step A, which may be relatively minor. But implementing Step A means giving up leverage for implementing Step B. Step B may be a lot more important, but no one knows whether Step B

will ever take place or what the final outcome will be. I am a student of negotiation, and this faulty structure is a sure way to bring down any negotiation. It is a major flaw that cannot be overcome without third-party intervention.

All of that aside, we have to come to grips with a reality that transcends both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority: the public mindset. The Israelis elected Sharon; Sharon does not operate in a vacuum. Israelis elected him for toughness, not to make compromises. In Israel today, the harsh responses of the government are popular. On the Palestinian side, Arafat is currently a popular leader, despite what we say about him. And unfortunately, more Palestinian people support suicide bombings now than they did five years ago. The mindsets of the two populations have become hardened. I interpret that in the following way: you cannot divide people into the categories of good or bad. People change depending on their threat perception. Most Israelis and Palestinians are driven by fear and insecurity much more than aggression. The vast majority of Israelis really want a peaceful settlement and are willing to give up the West Bank. The vast majority of Palestinians, even when they support suicide bombings, want the occupation to end and are willing to accept the State of Israel in the context of a peaceful settlement. Clearly, leaders have their own agendas, and they exploit events. But with the collapse of the Camp David negotiations, mutual existential fear has emerged. That fear has led both sides to see the present moment as a means of preventing defeat, not making peace; a stage to prevent failure, assert strength, and respond to insecurity. In a way, the means have overtaken the ends for both parties.

Let me explain what I mean. Whatever the cause of the Camp David collapse, most Palestinians do not blame Arafat for the failure, even though some of the elites do. To the extent that Arafat was unpopular, he was unpopular not for the negotiations but for his authoritarianism and his allowance of corruption in the PA. The Palestinian narrative of Camp David was that the Israelis offered the Palestinians a lot less than they could possibly accept and that it was a take-it-or-leave-it offer. The narrative holds that the Israeli offer was based on the assumption that if the Palestinians refused it, Israel would unleash the occupying power; and because the Palestinians were weak, they had no option but to take what Israel was giving. That is the narrative in the Palestinian arena. And I think the unfortunate public sympathy with the horrific bombings that emerged afterward was in part an assertion of empowerment. It was essentially the people saying, "We have options."

Israelis interpret the suicide bombings in two ways. One, that the Palestinians have not accepted Israel's existence and seek its destruction. Second and more important, the bombings are seen as a threat to the critical Israeli conventional and nuclear deterrent designed to be impenetrable. Indeed, the bombings pose a threat that has unleashed a new kind of insecurity and fear in Israeli society. The September 11 attacks exacerbated the problem, resulting in two alliances. Israel needs the United States, particularly when it feels that its deterrence is undermined; the United States is a strategic reservoir that expands that deterrence. The attacks on America enhanced U.S.-Israeli relations and therefore Israeli power. The Palestinian side needed its own reservoir of support, and in the absence of the Soviet Union, that support came from the Arab and Muslim world. Jerusalem was, in a way, the connection to that strategic reservoir and has thereby played into a dynamic that is much bigger than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the meantime, both the Israelis and the Palestinians have become trapped in their short-term responses to fear. I see no development yet that can address the fears of either side. Unless we put one on the table, I do not believe we can break the cycle of violence.

David Makovsky, The Washington Institute: I share the pessimism about where we are. It has not yet completely sunk in here, because there are too many other things going on -- Iraq, the war on terror, Iran. But we may have arrived at what I call a "unilateralis" moment. I do not say that with any satisfaction. I say it with a sense of despair, having just returned from the region. I return with a sense of an utterly dysfunctional political process, on all sides. Still, it is important to understand the context of this moment. The issue in the 1990s was partnership. You could

argue about how solid a partnership was formed between Israelis and Palestinians, but it was nevertheless a partnership predicated on some sort of negotiated solution. With the eruption of the intifada, the notion of partnership basically collapsed. Each side came to believe that there was no one to talk to. The hope was then born of creating a reformist element on the Palestinian side that would provide the political will to move forward; without political will, all the capacity of international assistance would not make a difference. The reformers thought they could set off a dynamic on the Israeli side: if Israelis believed that the Palestinians had the political will but that Sharon lacked it, they would throw Sharon out of office.

In the meantime, the White House was genuinely intrigued by the reform idea because it fit within their vision of Middle East democratization. The administration was interested in people like Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian finance minister, and Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), who has consistently spoken of the importance of choosing national responsibility over national unity -- that means cracking down on terror, if need be, for the sake of a larger goal. The idea also intrigued the Israeli public to the degree that the Israeli government became interested. However, I fear the reformist moment has passed. There has been insufficient will by all sides in capitalizing on that moment. And there has been a failure of imagination, whether in Ramallah, Jerusalem, or Washington.

The reform movement may have been a weak reed, but it was the only alternative, even as unilateralist options began to be discussed. Seventy percent of Palestinians say they want not just peace but reconciliation with Israel. This has been a consistent element in polling data, though not generally known. But Palestinians did not have a person at the top who was willing to move forward on that basis.

For example, American officials claim that all they wanted from Palestinian security chief Muhammad Dahlan was implementation of his ninety-day security plan. It was not an Israeli or an American plan. It was his own plan. By his own account he froze thirty-nine terrorist bank accounts and \$15 million was intercepted. Four tunnels were closed. (Some Israelis say this move was just public relations; Dahlan will tell you that the Israelis never found these tunnels when they were in charge.) But the Americans say Dahlan did not do what he promised. The problem goes beyond Dahlan. Abu Mazen also talks about how he was sabotaged from within. He says that Yasir Arafat controls three-fourths of the Palestinian security mechanisms and refuses to allow any coordination between those mechanisms and the rest of the government-controlled security services. Abu Mazen was faced with five different Palestinian security leaders having five different militias. In what country does every leader have his own militia? Traveling in Arab countries, I got a lot of private assessments of the situation. Jordan's King Abdullah II told our group of journalists that he thought there should be a unified command under the Palestinian prime minister.

Of course, Israel did not do things that could have contributed to a better climate. Yes, the government took down twenty settler outposts. But at the same time at least sixteen or eighteen -- some say twenty-three -- new ones went up. They were put up by settlers, not by the Israeli government. But the government has to take them down; then people in the cabinet say, "Why should we expend efforts going after the outposts when we might need those same soldiers to fight terrorists?" Of course, there is no moral equivalence between a bomb and a bulldozer; a human life, once lost, is irretrievably gone. But certainly action on the outposts would have shined a spotlight on the lack of momentum on the Palestinian side.

Still, it is simply unrealistic to expect Sharon to do everything while the Palestinian side does nothing. It cannot work that way. As hard as it is for Israelis and Palestinians to take each other on, it is even harder for each side to take on their own. A huge amount of political capital needs to be expended by both sides. The United States cannot do it for the parties. We have reached a fork in the road where we can either salvage the Roadmap or realize that we have reached the unilateralist moment. I am dubious about the former scenario. None of the parties, given past performance, are likely to expend the political capital to take on their own, or do so in a synchronized fashion, even with the most energetic U.S. efforts. I do not see the Arab states publicly imposing on Arafat their idea of a unified

command structure under a Palestinian prime minister. From the reports I read in the Palestinian press, all of Abu Mazen's people are being thrown out in this new government, and there is a new security council. Yes, there is a unified command -- under Arafat.

As for the checkpoints, they are derived from a security situation. In the summer of 2000, when Camp David was taking place, there were no bombs going off, and there were hardly any checkpoints set up in the West Bank. People are mixing cause and effect. The checkpoints are a function of the bombs. They did not precede the bombs. Have they exacerbated frustration? Having been in the West Bank and seeing the long lines, I can attest to that. But let us just be clear about how the checkpoints came about, and why, therefore, they are not likely to be reduced until the security situation improves. Even when there was a hudna, Israel was intercepting a lot of attacks that just didn't make the news because they were unsuccessful.

I would refer to something President Bush said at Camp David on September 18, 2003, which suggests that the United States will not suddenly intervene for the parties. The president said, and I quote: "And hopefully, at some point in time, a leadership of the PA will emerge which will then commit itself 100 percent to fighting off terror. And then we'll be able to consolidate the power necessary to fight off terror. And when that happens, the world will come together to provide the conditions for hope." Without being Talmudic, we can read from this statement that the United States does not want peace more than the parties want peace. It will not expend its political capital when it does not believe it has a chance of getting a result -- or does not see the Arab states expending the same political capital. Have there been quiet messages from the Arab states? Yes. But I refer you to a letter from Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to Yasir Arafat, which said, "Fight Hamas and Islamic Jihad." Arafat reportedly replied, "I'll believe what he says in Arabic to his own people."

I believe that it is only a matter of time before Israel adopts a unilateralist policy. I do not know if that moment is one or two bombs away. At minimum, Arafat and his advisors will remain under some form of lock and key for the foreseeable future. And Israel will build the fence. The question is, will Israel build it in a way that makes it safer to leave the West Bank, or in a way that makes it safer to stay in the West Bank? Is the fence being built as a buffer, or is it being built as part of an encirclement strategy? These two paradigms make a big difference. I just hope that the route is chosen in a way that enables the Palestinians to have contiguity. Israel cannot run the fence around every outpost, every settlement, every bypass road, and every checkpoint. The West Bank is a small area. If the route of the fence is not chosen with wisdom, the West Bank will become uninhabitable. I hope that Israel has some political or military strategy in this regard, which I found missing on my trip.

If we have reached the unilateralist moment, Israel will do something big politically. It will get out of Gaza, perhaps, or take down some of the remote settlements. Whatever Israel does will be connected to a broader strategy based on the idea of partition. Maybe peace is not possible, but given the demographics that Israel faces, partition is no less urgent. And it might just leave the door open for negotiations someday.

I wish I were wrong. I wish there were a way to salvage the Roadmap. But the analyst in me suggests that the amount of synchronization, political will, and dialogue required is of such a magnitude that it would be -- well, we are nowhere near that point today. It would require a quantum leap. I wish I could be as optimistic as Israeli deputy prime minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian minister of information Nabeel Amir were earlier in these proceedings, and I hope that Shibley and I are both wrong.

Dennis Ross, The Washington Institute: I have known Shibley and David for a long time. They are both very thoughtful observers, and it is striking how pessimistic they sound. David's conclusion, that he wishes he could be as optimistic as Ministers Amir and Olmert, contains an interesting paradox. Shibley and David are observers of the scene, while Ministers Amir and Olmert are those who might shape the scene. Maybe we need to take a step back and look at our real choices.

Shibley and David have presented a structural analysis that suggests there was an opening, and the opening was lost. They have suggested that there was an opening because there was a kind of exhaustion on both sides, and no one wanted to say no to President Bush after Saddam Husayn fell. But at the same time, no one really wanted to say yes to him, either. Each side had their own completely different definition of the Roadmap, neither of which had anything in common with the other, and neither of which had anything in common with the U.S. view of the Roadmap.

I agree that there was an opening and that the opening has been lost. As David said, everyone bears responsibility for losing that moment, including the United States. President Bush talked about accountability, but I can tell you from long experience, there is no such thing as private accountability. If it is not public, it does not exist. The United States was not there to define the strict parameters of the Roadmap and what constituted compliance. So America did not do its part.

Both panelists feel that there is no opening now, in part because the United States lacks the will to create the kind of dramatic moment that will be necessary. To move forward, the Israelis need to pause for an assessment of where they are and what they are doing, and the Palestinians need justification to act against terrorist groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), who hold the power to frustrate any process.

Still, in his earlier comments, Minister Amir did not say the moment is over. And I know from my own conversation with the new Palestinian prime minister, Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala), that he does not believe the moment is lost. So the question is what would it take, at this point, to make progress possible? There is, after all, an interesting paradox. If you ask the Israeli public what outcome they expect, and then ask the Palestinian public what outcome they expect, you find that the gap between the two views is not very wide. But there is, at the same time, an environment containing the loss of faith and belief. To call it a loss of confidence or trust trivializes the moment. It is much more fundamental and profound. Each side has become so consumed by its own sense of grievance that it does not believe the other side is able or willing to do what is necessary.

On the Israeli side, there exists an absolute conviction that the Palestinians really are not interested in peace, that the suicide bombing is not about occupation, because it kills people in buses, nightclubs, and pizza parlors in Israel proper. The Palestinian insistence on the right of return for refugees confirms the view among Israelis that this is about Israel's existence. On the Palestinian side, there is just as profound a belief that the Israelis will never be willing to give up control. The idea that Israel would ever accept the reality of Palestinian independence is something very few, if any, Palestinians believe. So the hope of concluding a final arrangement any time soon strains the bounds of credibility.

We are on the brink of losing the diplomatic option, at least for the foreseeable future. This reality should change each side's incentive structure. Could this be used to affect Israeli choices? Could it be used to affect what the Palestinians or the Arab states are prepared to do? The concept of a Roadmap per se is not necessarily wrong. But we have to get from where we are to where peacemaking can be made believable again. Does the political will exist to take what are fundamentally difficult steps? Shibley described the lack of incentives and the inherent contradictions on each side. It is hard to believe that -- absent dramatically different American intervention -- the necessary political will can be mustered. If that is true, are we left only with the unilateralist option? Neither side looks on this option with great favor. Otherwise, Israel would already have employed it. The Palestinian side fears this option, and the Arab world certainly will not be favorable toward it.

The Arabs are going to have to help the Palestinians in psychological, political, and material ways. If the PA is expected to take on Hamas and PIJ, the Arab world must be prepared to embrace the idea that those who use violent means to reject peaceful coexistence are enemies. Having that kind of overt, explicit Arab support is important.

I subscribed long ago to the model that says you never give up. You simply cannot give in to those who want to ensure perpetual struggle, violence, victims, and suffering. If we cannot change the incentive structure right now, maybe we should think about parallel unilateral steps. To think that there can be a unilateral outcome is absurd on its face. There are two parties. Neither side is going to go away. Whatever action is taken unilaterally will, by definition, be temporary, unless we create some parallelism.

Israel's fence-slash-wall needs to be thought about in strategic terms. If Israelis do not believe they have a diplomatic option now -- which means they do not have security -- then they will build the wall. The question is how can we respond to the security and demography on both sides in a way that does not preclude negotiations somewhere down the road. If Israel's buffer is designed to ensure that there can still be a diplomatic process, then it must evacuate some settlements. It will involve restructuring security so that Israel does not need large numbers of soldiers to protect a small number of settlers. And if the Israelis do, in fact, withdraw from considerable parts of the West Bank, then Palestinians will have to assume responsibilities.

Parallel unilateralism would not mean trying to forge an agreement right now, but rather working out parallel steps that could change the environment for the better and eventually provide the opportunity to make peace. That is about as optimistic as I can be.

Telhami: I am not a determinist. I believe the situation can be turned around. I do not believe you should only use diplomacy when the time is ripe; you create ripe opportunities. Effective leadership that does not exploit fear, but rather builds on hope, can create a new atmosphere. The question is whether we are likely to get effective leadership now, either in Israel or in the Palestinian Authority -- or, more importantly, here in America.

Not only is the fence an unviable option for either side, it is potentially disastrous. Forget about the moral and legal issues. It would be destructive to Israel's selfinterest. What is the core Israeli interest? Security -- one that is based largely on deterrence. In some ways, the past two years have seen a remarkable short-term enhancement of Israeli deterrence. No one challenged Israel's assertion of power in the West Bank in any meaningful way. And Israel's strategic relationship with the United States has never been stronger. Most people around the world do not see any light between Israel and the United States on certain positions. If the idea is for the United States to serve as a strategic projection of Israeli deterrence, that idea has succeeded.

But what has this accomplished? It has prevented others from thinking that Israel can be defeated, but it has not enabled Israel to bring about an enduring settlement. Israeli deterrence is now tied to the world's perception of America, to such an extent that what happens in Iraq will very much affect how people view Israel. If America, with all its might, is seen to be running from Iraq -- and I hope America does not; the stakes are too high -- then you can imagine what lessons will be learned by those who think they can defeat Israel through militant means.

Now, what would happen if Israel imposed a unilateral settlement in that context? Why was there never a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, which would have been the easiest option? Why was there fear about the withdrawal from Lebanon? Because if you are perceived to be pulling out under duress without an agreement that settles the conflict, then your enemies are even more emboldened. Israel would only impose a unilateral settlement if it were trying to run away from casualties. Yet, ironically, Israel would be encouraging those who are motivated by territorial withdrawal to take advantage of perceived Israeli weakness. In this way, Israel would actually be undermining its own deterrence. In the short term, you can buy time and make it harder for people to cross into your territory. But there will be a new means the next morning or maybe a month down the road. In the meantime, with its deterrence still at maximum, Israel is wasting a historic strategic opportunity -- particularly given the relationship it has with the United States at this critical moment.

Each side has dramatic incentive to accept that we are at a critical juncture and that we must move forward.

Palestinians understand that they cannot defeat Israel through military means. The Arab countries also understand that. This is an opportunity we must exploit. But in order to capture it, we need leadership. And where will that come from? I certainly do not see it on the ground, and I do not believe Washington -- particularly as it enters a presidential campaign -- understands the issue's centrality.

Makovsky: Ideally, I agree with Shibley. It's all about political will. I just despair because I do not see the leadership out there that can bring Shibley's ideal scenario to fruition. If I had one criticism of the Bush administration, it would be that when both prime ministers were here in early August 2003, neither was given a timetable. Part of the problem was that the White House believed Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) did not have the authority to act -- that security remained in Arafat's hands. This was most dramatically brought home to me after the horrific bombing of the bus returning from the Western Wall, when all those children were blown up. Abu Mazen understood the situation. The Palestinian cabinet understood the situation. But they ran to Arafat's office, and he said no, they could not crack down. So, there is an issue not just of will but of capability and authority.

Any fence Israel builds must not be too obtrusive and must be matched by a political step like withdrawal from Gaza or from some remote settlements. This would communicate that Israel wants to give the Palestinians contiguity, and the Israeli people security. The problem with the status quo, in which we are just waiting for the next eighteen-year-old bomber to make his way into an Israeli city, is that the Palestinian side is still saying to Israel: do not expect us to dismantle the terror infrastructure; do not touch Hamas; get rid of the checkpoints; and do not build a fence to protect yourself. Under these four conditions, the situation is simply not sustainable.

A unilateral option must get Israel out of the places it should not be, and must eschew an encirclement strategy. If Israel thinks it can have a fence everywhere on the West Bank, that it can keep 226,000 people in 144 settlements with 100 percent security for everyone in those settlements, it will be a fool's paradise. The net effect will be that more and more people will begin calling for a one-state solution. Right now, only Edward Said and a few Palestinians at the margins of the debate are doing so. The mainstream has not yet given up on a two-state solution.

The fence should be done in a smart way that protects the 75 percent of settlers who live in 5 percent of the territories. I do not say that Israel should pull out of 95 percent of the West Bank right now. But it can build the fence in a way that suggests Israel can keep most of its settlers, and the Palestinians can have contiguity and dignity. The unilateral option is not my preferred solution. But with the current leadership, an agreement will not happen. Instead of fooling ourselves, we must prepare for where things are really heading.

Nabil Fahmy, Arab Republic of Egypt: I am the ambassador of Egypt to the United States. I tend to share the pessimism regarding the Roadmap. Nevertheless, I do not believe unilateralism is an option if we still want a peace process. It is an option only if we want to break away from that process. Neither side, at this time, will unilaterally give the other anything that is constructive enough to contribute positively. If we go down that road, we will end up destroying hopes for peace.

Conversely, parallel unilateralism requires a third party to take the leadership role and get constructive elements from each of the two sides. Essentially, it requires a dramatic step from the Israelis regarding territory -- be it a freeze on settlements or territorial withdrawals. On the Palestinian side, it requires a concrete and effective step toward providing more security for Israelis. If you believe that you can get a statement from the Sharon government on freezing settlements or implementing significant withdrawals, then you might be able to get a statement from the Palestinians regarding security, including assurances that there would be an extended hudna with more accountability and transparency in terms of security assistance. This approach entails a significant risk, one that the Bush administration is probably not willing to undertake during an election year.

Let me add that the process of parallel unilateralism could also involve contacts with the Arab world, but you cannot

ask the Arab states to take the first steps. Frankly, I disagree with the notion that the Arab world has not done enough at this point. Look at the Beirut Summit statement, which went directly to the issues of normalization and refugees. Events ultimately diluted the significance of this statement, but the Arab world did attempt to address these issues that are so important to Israelis.

Regarding the issue of condemning Hamas, Egypt went even further. Egypt, not America, was the only foreign party standing by Abu Mazen and Arafat when they reached an agreement on hudna with Hamas. The idea that the Arabs did not make a sufficient effort is not completely correct. Still, you cannot expect the Arab states to continue unless there is a political dividend from Israel that Arab leaders can show their constituencies.

I don't think that any of the parties are committing enough to the Roadmap to keep it alive. It was born on life support. And if it were not for the Americans, the Arabs, the Europeans, and other international actors, it would not have survived this long. Still, while I am pessimistic about the Roadmap, if we allow it to die now we will fall into a negative unilateralism. We will give the agenda to the extremists on both sides, who will plant the seeds of conflict for the future.

Makovsky: I hope I did not say the Arab states have done nothing. Omar Suliman, indeed, was involved at the beginning of the hudna. But the Arab states should have done more, later on in the process, to publicly pressure Arafat for a unified command structure. The idea of the unified command is at the heart of the solution, and it would have produced other steps.

I believe Saudi crown prince Abdullah's initiative at the Beirut Summit did move the ball a little. It was useful because it was presented in Arabic at an Arab League meeting. But it happened the same day as the Netanya bombing. Credit for the bombing was claimed in Beirut -- the same city as the summit -- and yet there was not a word about it from the summit attendees. That took away from the strength of the meeting's statement.

I would have liked to have seen an Arab Roadmap that coordinated with the Beirut initiative. At every phase of the Bush Roadmap, the Arab Roadmap would indicate what the Arab world would do to integrate Israel into the Middle East and reinforce the peace process. This is not to say that only the Arabs should do things. But when the parties move forward, there is also an Arab state responsibility. Do not just draw a picture of the rainbow and say that at the end of the rainbow you will open an embassy somewhere in Israel.

If we cannot salvage the Roadmap, we will have to work toward coordinated unilateralism. U.S.-Israeli and U.S.-Palestinian diplomacy can work in that regard to minimize the blow. Those sorts of bilateral discussions will become increasingly important in the months ahead.

Telhami: Imagine if Prime Minister Sharon were to make a speech to the Israeli and Palestinian people and say, "This is a strategic moment. I want to capture it. I am calling for a freeze in settlements, and I am freezing the wall. Now I want to see the Palestinians stop the violence." Obviously, this is highly unlikely if you look at the politics of Israel and this party. But if Sharon did something like that, we would have a completely transformed environment.

We have seen such leadership before. We saw what Anwar Sadat did when President Jimmy Carter created a moment. We saw what Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat accomplished. We tend to forget that in 1993 people did not think an Israeli-Palestinian agreement was possible. It surprised everyone. We now think it was not such a good idea. Maybe it was not, but it opened up new possibilities in people's thinking. It changed minds. One can imagine something like this happening again.

The immediate implementation of a comprehensive deal is not possible. Any implementation will have to be incremental. That entails agreeing on terms of the final settlement. People have to know where they are headed. If both sides know exactly what they will get at the end of the process, they will be patient within a longer implementation timeframe, and more willing to engage in reciprocal steps. So if I were to create a new initiative, I

would force the final settlement issues to include immediate broad agreements with incremental implementation.

Edward Abington, Palestinian Authority: It seems to me that we already have an example of Israeli unilateralism in Gaza. When I first went to Gaza in 1972, I drove past two orange fifty-gallon oil drums, and that was how I knew I had arrived. Today, going into Gaza is like going through the Berlin Wall. Gaza is an example of the unilateral Israeli solution. Today, it has something like a 50 to 60 percent poverty rate and a 60 to 70 percent unemployment rate. After working on this problem on and off for thirty years, I think a two-state solution may no longer be possible. The Israelis are so entrenched in the West Bank, and there is such a disintegration of Palestinian society, politics, and economy. If anything, the presenters have understated the situation on the ground in the territories. What we see today in Gaza is what we will get in the future West Bank with a unilateral solution, and it may be worse.

Makovsky: When I say that Israel should get out of Gaza as part of a unilateral solution, I mean that Israel should get the settlements out of Gaza. Use that move as a demonstration project. This would have an impact on the demographic balance and help things move forward. If the Palestinians only see more new things erected -- more fences, more outposts, more checkpoints, and more access roads without any settlements coming down, they will have little hope.

If Israel is going to do more fence building, there should be an offsetting move to demonstrate partition, which is the whole idea of separation. So far, the fence is effective in Gaza; it has stopped more than 300 attacks. I understand that the only suicide bomber who got through from Gaza carried a British passport. The demography of the West Bank is completely different, and I am not here to say that this is a panacea. The fence should not be the end of the road. But we are in a very difficult bind right now. Without better political leadership, the question is what measures can ease things for both sides and make partition more likely.

Telhami: In the short term, a two-state solution is still possible, but the momentum is against it. Not only are there remarkable geographic changes on the ground that could make a two-state solution impossible down the road, but there has been a transformation of the conflict. The only logic of the two-state solution is the nationalist framing. We are now seeing the demise of nationalism and the creeping infusion of ethnic and religious language. If you frame the conflict in increasingly religious and ethnic terms, the two-state solution will not suffice for anyone.

People do not understand how the world is changing around them. For two or three decades, most Arab elites in Israel preferred the Hebrew media. It was better than the Arab media they could get. It helped shape their views. It helped make them closer to Israelis. They knew more about Maccabi Tel Aviv than about any soccer team in Saudi Arabia or Jordan. Today, most Arab intellectuals, including most of the Arab population in Israel and the Palestinian territories, get their news from al-Jazeera, al-Arabiyya, and other Arab satellite networks. This is creating a completely different intellectual orientation and worldview in a way that is bound to have consequences down the road. There is a lot going on that makes the ideal sort of solution to this conflict much more difficult to envision.

Robert Lieber, Georgetown University: I too share the panel's pessimism. When it comes to this subject, I am always cautiously pessimistic. However, I disagree with Shibley's interpretation of this increasingly dangerous situation, specifically on three points: mirror imaging, Yasir Arafat, and Hamas.

The assumption about mirror imaging misses the key dynamic: the two most dovish governments in Israel were destroyed by actions that had everything to do with Arafat and violence. Shibley mentioned Sadat and what he was willing to do, and that speaks volumes. But I do not agree with the supposition that there is a cycle of violence with mutual responsibility. I would put much more onus on the Palestinian side, specifically on Arafat and Hamas.

Shibley mentioned the Palestinian narrative of the year 2000 and Camp David. It was a very insightful point. But who is responsible for that narrative? Arafat, from 1994 onward, used incitement, control of the media, intimidation, and arrests to produce a dysfunctional and dishonest narrative. Ambassador Ross has given a much more

straightforward interpretation of what was offered to the Palestinians in the year 2000, which is in contradiction with the prevailing narrative. Yasir Arafat is responsible for undermining Abu Mazen and inciting terrorism.

Finally, Shibley makes the point that Hamas is being asked to commit suicide, but there can never be a viable peace process unless the Israelis are dealing with one central authority. There cannot be multiple authorities on the other side. Dealing with Hamas, even if it means dismantling it, is a sine qua non, whether this is fair to Hamas or not. No revolutionary movement can achieve its aims unless it has a central authority that embraces practical solutions.

Telhami: I really do not want to get back into the Camp David discussion. It is just too distracting. With regard to mirror imaging, I hear the argument about moral equivalence all the time. When I speak in the Palestinian areas and in the Arab world, they accuse me of moral equivalence, too, because they say I am equating the occupied with the occupier. I do not buy that argument at all, frankly. I am an analyst. Everyone has to make their own moral judgments.

My point on Hamas was neither that Hamas must ultimately be allowed to operate, nor that it has to be completely disarmed. The point is that the Roadmap is predicated on Hamas cooperating in its own dismemberment. If we ask Hamas to maintain a ceasefire while we strengthen the PA with the arms and the intelligence to destroy Hamas infrastructure, how can we possibly expect Hamas to cooperate?

Obviously, no authority should allow another party to launch attacks from its territories. And the Palestinians will have to take on Hamas at some point, not only for moral reasons; there will have to be a single authority. The PA is not capable of this now for two reasons: first, they lack the military capacity; and second, they lack the public support. They need both in order to get there.

The Palestinian strategy for Hamas is predicated on a model not of dismemberment, but of eventual disarmament. What does that mean? They arrange a ceasefire with them, win over public opinion against them, and then lure them into a political process. They then force them to disarm, but do not dismember them; Hamas may become a political party. This is a different model from the dismemberment envisioned by the United States and Israel and predicated in the Roadmap.

Michael Stein, The Washington Institute: I want to respond to the Berlin Wall comment. I have heard that analogy used many times. It is totally inappropriate -- and dead wrong. The Berlin Wall was intended to imprison the people of East Berlin within that city. The fence is intended to keep murderers out of Israel. These are two entirely different things. Fair-minded people should not make such analogies.

I want to address Dr. Telhami's comment as well. No one expects Hamas to acquiesce in its own demise. What we expect is that a responsible Palestinian government will do what any responsible government must do, and that is to control and dismember -- yes, dismember, not reach a ceasefire with -- criminal elements in its midst. It must be recognized that Hamas is destroying the Palestinians' opportunity to achieve their dream of a state. They will never get that state through violence, and most of the Palestinian people understand this. If the PA wishes to be recognized as a legitimate, responsible government, it must act like one.

Dr. Telhami said that we are too distracted by personalities, but then he launched into some comments about Prime Minister Sharon, specifically that Sharon cannot accept anything near what the Palestinians can accept. He juxtaposed Sharon with Hamas, completely leaving out of his equation the one issue that is at the heart of the conflict: Yasir Arafat. Of course Palestinians do not blame Arafat for the failure of Camp David. They are subject to propaganda from all the sources of information that Arafat controls. The only thing they know and believe is what Arafat tells them to believe, and that is the heart of the problem.

Everyone who knows American industrial history understands that no one could have founded and built the Ford Motor Company except Henry Ford. But there came a point at which if he had stayed in control, he would have

destroyed the company. Everyone around him understood that, and this is why he was replaced by his grandson, who then perpetuated the growth of the company. It is a tragedy of historic proportions that when the Palestinian people are within reach of their state, they have a leader who will not get them there. Until Palestinians understand that and make the appropriate adjustment, we will be discussing these issues forever without getting anywhere.

Telhami: I do not disagree with you that the PA will have to deal with Hamas. The question is what that means and whether the PA is capable of doing it right now. Does it mean preventing Hamas from attacking, or does it mean disarming Hamas? There is a difference between either of those options and dismembering Hamas's social organizations. You can argue that the social organizations only exist so that the military wing can eventually rearm. But it will be practically impossible for the PA to engage in dismembering the entire organization. We can argue about what it will take and how much Israeli or American help is required, but we do not disagree on the fact that the PA will have to disarm Hamas at some point.

Regarding Arafat, I do not agree with you that the source of the Palestinian narrative is simply that Arafat brainwashed his people. No one has that kind of power. Look at the Palestinian arena. How many people watch PA television in the West Bank and Gaza? How many people listen to PA radio? They are watching the satellite networks. People do not believe what Arafat tells them or does not tell them. There is not that kind of faith in him. Our own media has not been telling the story like Dennis would tell it in his memoirs. There has been a very simplistic interpretation of what happened at Camp David. When Dennis's book comes out, we will see that he is much more nuanced about what transpired. Perhaps the blame is not equally divided, but there was a lot of blame all the way around.

I will give you my own judgment of Arafat. The Palestinian people would have been much better off if Arafat had resigned a long time ago, not only because he is not the right person to take the Palestinian people where they want to go, but because accountability should be a factor in Middle Eastern politics. Even if the Palestinian people do not blame Arafat for the failure, he got them there. Most Israelis do not blame Ehud Barak for the failure at Camp David; they blame Arafat. But they kicked Barak out. It is a question of accountability. When you lose a war, even if you think the enemy is responsible, you hold your own leaders accountable. I would have loved to have seen Arafat resign in 1991 after morally mishandling certain responsibilities, and, frankly, I wish Sharon never would have run for prime minister after being morally judged for his actions as defense minister.

I have a different interpretation of what Arafat wants. I do not think he wants to die as a martyr. I think he is a leader with a lot of corruption around him. He himself was never into personal corruption; he dedicated himself to the cause and tied that cause to himself. He hungers for power and wants to be the first president of Palestine. But the reality is that if his project fails and the peace process collapses, if Hamas and Islamic Jihad win, if he does not produce a state for the Palestinians, he will have failed his people and his historic legacy. So I still think it is in Arafat's own power-hungry interests to see a political settlement with a two-state solution. The real issue is how you use that interest as an incentive to create a process that can succeed.

Makovsky: Last year, an American negotiator said to Arafat, "If you do not set up that state, sir, you are a failure." (The irony should not be lost on anyone that an American negotiator was begging Arafat to set up a Palestinian state.) And he said, "No, I am not." What he cares about is history. We are defining success for him in a way that he does not define it for himself. We define success by what he gets economically and territorially. He defines success by what he does not give away ideologically. Those are two very different definitions. Saddam Husayn once told Dan Rather, "I won the last war," and everyone laughed. But Husayn said, "My definition of victory was that I was left standing after the invasion of Kuwait." Every leader defines success differently.

I had dinner last week in Amman with a former prime minister of Jordan. Everyone remembers Black September, but no one remembers the months leading up to Black September -- how King Hussein was convinced that if he only

offered Arafat a better deal, Arafat would crack down on terror. But he did not do it. The king kept offering better deals, and Arafat did not take them. The same thing happened in 1975 with Sulayman Franjiya in Lebanon. President Franjiya said to Arafat, "I was with you in letting you to come to Lebanon. I only asked one thing of you: keep your fighters in their camps outside Beirut. If you keep letting them go out, there will be a civil war in this country." Famous last words. A civil war began in Lebanon that year that lasted fifteen years.

Everyone thinks they can reshape Arafat, but no one can. I believe that Arafat sees survival and effectiveness as inversely proportional. If you survive, you are not effective. If you are effective, you do not survive. Combining that insight with a sense of Arafat's view of history, I see absolutely no evidence to suggest that he can go for a two-state solution. I wrote a book on this topic after the Oslo Accords. I was hopeful that something could change. Were there mistakes in the Oslo process? There were a ton of mistakes. But I see no evidence to suggest that we will get anywhere as long as Arafat is the Palestinian leader.

Do I think Sharon can make peace? No. But the difference is that Sharon will be voted out, because every Israeli prime minister since 1981 has been voted out when Israelis have felt that the leader was not pushing the envelope on peace when there was hope, or on security when there was the kind of existential fear that Shibley mentioned. The only one who got Sharon reelected was Arafat. This is not rocket science. In the 1990s, when the Israelis saw a chance for peace, they voted for Rabin and Barak. When they were getting blown up, it was hard for them to vote in the same way. If you cannot make peace, at least make peace possible. Let others go forward. Facilitate their progress. Do not obstruct it.

Ross: In closing, bear in mind that there is no such thing as the status quo. The situation will not remain static. We will move in one direction or the other. As all parties begin to think about the implications of this reality, they have to rethink the costs of inaction. They may find that the costs of action begin to look much more affordable. ❖

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