

The Aftermath of Camp David 2000

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Apr 21, 2002

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.

Brit Hume, Fox News: Former Middle East envoy Dennis Ross has worked to achieve Middle East peace throughout President Clinton's final days in office. In the months following Clinton's failed peace summit at Camp David, U.S. negotiators continued behind-the-scenes peace talks with the Palestinians and Israelis up until January 2001, and that followed Clinton's presentation of ideas at the end of December 2000.

Dennis Ross joins us now with more details on all that, and Fred Barnes joins the questioning.

So, Dennis, talk to us a little bit, if you can -- I might note that we're proud to be able to say that you're a Fox News contributing analyst.

Dennis Ross: Thank you.

Hume: Talk to us about the sequence of events. The Camp David talks, there was an offer. That was rejected. Talks continued. You come now to December, and the president has a new set of ideas. What unfolded?

Ross: Let me give you the sequence, because I think it puts all this in perspective.

Number one, at Camp David we did not put a comprehensive set of ideas on the table. We put ideas on the table that would have affected the borders and would have affected Jerusalem.

Arafat could not accept any of that. In fact, during the fifteen days there, he never himself raised a single idea. His negotiators did, to be fair to them, but he didn't. The only new idea he raised at Camp David was that the temple didn't exist in Jerusalem, it existed in Nablus.

Hume: This is the temple where Ariel Sharon paid a visit, which was used as a kind of a pre-text for the beginning of the new intifada, correct?

Ross: This is the core of the Jewish faith.

Hume: Right.

Ross: So he was denying the core of the Jewish faith there.

After the summit, he immediately came back to us and he said, "We need to have another summit," to which we said, "We just shot our wad. We got a no from you. You're prepared actually do a deal before we go back to something like that."

He agreed to set up a private channel between his people and the Israelis, which I joined at the end of August. And there were serious discussions that went on, and we were poised to present our ideas the end of September, which is when the intifada erupted. He knew we were poised to present the ideas. His own people were telling him they looked good. And we asked him to intervene to ensure there wouldn't be violence after the Sharon visit, the day after. He said he would. He didn't lift a finger.

Now, eventually we were able to get back to a point where private channels between the two sides led each of them to again ask us to present the ideas. This was in early December. We brought the negotiators here.

Hume: Now, this was a request to the Clinton administration . . .

Ross: Yes.

Hume: . . . to formulate a plan. Both sides wanted this?

Ross: Absolutely.

Hume: All right.

Ross: Both sides asked us to present these ideas.

Hume: All right. And they were?

Ross: The ideas were presented on December 23 by the president, and they basically said the following: On borders, there would be about a 5 percent annexation in the West Bank for the Israelis and a 2 percent swap. So there would be a net 97 percent of the territory that would go to the Palestinians.

On Jerusalem, the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem would become the capitol of the Palestinian state.

On the issue of refugees, there would be a right of return for the refugees to their own state, not to Israel, but there would also be a fund of \$30 billion internationally that would be put together for either compensation or to cover repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation costs.

And when it came to security, there would be a international presence, in place of the Israelis, in the Jordan Valley.

These were ideas that were comprehensive, unprecedented, stretched very far, represented a culmination of an effort in our best judgment as to what each side could accept after thousands of hours of debate, discussion with each side.

Fred Barnes, Weekly Standard: Now, Palestinian officials say to this day that Arafat said yes.

Ross: Arafat came to the White House on January 2. Met with the president, and I was there in the Oval Office. He said yes, and then he added reservations that basically meant he rejected every single one of the things he was supposed to give.

Hume: What was he supposed to give?

Ross: He supposed to give, on Jerusalem, the idea that there would be for the Israelis sovereignty over the Western Wall, which would cover the areas that are of religious significance to Israel. He rejected that.

Hume: He rejected their being able to have that?

Ross: He rejected that.

He rejected the idea on the refugees. He said we need a whole new formula, as if what we had presented was non-existent.

He rejected the basic ideas on security. He wouldn't even countenance the idea that the Israelis would be able to operate in Palestinian airspace.

You know when you fly into Israel today you go to Ben Gurion. You fly in over the West Bank because you can't -- there's no space through otherwise. He rejected that.

So every single one of the ideas that was asked of him he rejected.

Hume: Now, let's take a look at the map. Now, this is what -- how the Israelis had created a map based on the president's ideas. And . . .

Ross: Right.

Hume: . . . what can we -- that situation shows that the territory at least is contiguous. What about Gaza on that map?

Ross: The Israelis would have gotten completely out of Gaza.

Ross: And what you see also in this line, they show an area of temporary Israeli control along the border.

Hume: Right.

Ross: Now, that was an Israeli desire. That was not what we presented. But we presented something that did point out that it would take six years before the Israelis would be totally out of the Jordan Valley.

So that map there that you see, which shows a very narrow green space along the border, would become part of the orange. So the Palestinians would have in the West Bank an area that was contiguous. Those who say there were cantons, completely untrue. It was contiguous.

Hume: Cantons being ghettos, in effect . . .

Ross: Right.

Hume: . . . that would be cut off from other parts of the Palestinian state.

Ross: Completely untrue.

And to connect Gaza with the West Bank, there would have been an elevated highway, an elevated railroad, to ensure that there would be not just safe passage for the Palestinians, but free passage.

Barnes: I have two other questions. One, the Palestinians point out that this was never put on paper, this offer. Why not?

Ross: We presented this to them so that they could record it. When the president presented it, he went over it at dictation speed. He then left the cabinet room. I stayed behind. I sat with them to be sure, and checked to be sure that every single word.

The reason we did it this way was to be sure they had it and they could record it. But we told the Palestinians and Israelis, if you cannot accept these ideas, this is the culmination of the effort, we withdraw them. We did not want to formalize it. We wanted them to understand we meant what we said. You don't accept it, it's not for negotiation, this is the end of it, we withdraw it.

So that's why they have it themselves recorded. And to this day, the Palestinians have not presented to their own people what was available.

Barnes: In other words, Arafat might use it as a basis for further negotiations so he'd get more?

Ross: Well, exactly.

Hume: Which is what, in fact, he tried to do, according to your account.

Ross: We treated it as not only a culmination. We wanted to be sure it couldn't be a floor for negotiations.

Hume: Right.

Ross: It couldn't be a ceiling. It was the roof.

Hume: This was a final offer?

Ross: Exactly. Exactly right.

Hume: This was the solution.

Barnes: Was Arafat alone in rejecting it? I mean, what about his negotiators?

Ross: It's very clear to me that his negotiators understood this was the best they were ever going to get. They wanted him to accept it. He was not prepared to accept it.

Hume: Now, it is often said that this whole sequence of talks here sort of fell apart or ended or broke down or whatever because of the intervention of the Israeli elections. What about that?

Ross: The real issue you have to understand was not the Israeli elections. It was the end of the Clinton administration. The reason we would come with what was a culminating offer was because we were out of time.

They asked us to present the ideas, both sides. We were governed by the fact that the Clinton administration was going to end, and both sides said we understand this is the point of decision.

Hume: What, in your view, was the reason that Arafat, in effect, said no?

Ross: Because fundamentally I do not believe he can end the conflict. We had one critical clause in this agreement, and that clause was, this is the end of the conflict.

Arafat's whole life has been governed by struggle and a cause. Everything he has done as leader of the Palestinians is to always leave his options open, never close a door. He was being asked here, you've got to close the door. For him to end the conflict is to end himself.

Hume: Might it not also have been true, though, Dennis, that, because the intifada had already begun -- so you had the Camp David offer rejected, the violence begins anew, a new offer from the Clinton administration comes along, the Israelis agree to it, Barak agrees to it...

Ross: Yes.

Hume: . . . might he not have concluded that the violence was working?

Ross: It is possible he concluded that. It is possible he thought he could do and get more with the violence. There's no doubt in my mind that he thought the violence would create pressure on the Israelis and on us and maybe the rest of the world.

And I think there's one other factor. You have to understand that Barak was able to reposition Israel internationally. Israel was seen as having demonstrated unmistakably it wanted peace, and the reason it wasn't available, achievable was because Arafat wouldn't accept it.

Arafat needed to re-establish the Palestinians as a victim, and unfortunately they are a victim, and we see it now in a terrible way.

Hume: Dennis Ross, thank you so much. ❖

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 \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)