

# The Powell Mission and the Bush Speech: Making Peace Possible?

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Brief Analysis

**O**n April 12, Dennis Ross, counselor and Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute, addressed the Institute's Special Policy Forum with Robert Satloff. The following is a rapporteur's summary of Ambassador Ross's remarks. Please note that these remarks were made on April 12, near the beginning of Secretary of State Colin Powell's mission. [Read a summary \(templateC05.php?CID=1494\)](#) of Dr. Satloff's remarks.

Secretary of State Colin Powell and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon exchanged warm words regarding the U.S.-Israel relationship at a press conference on April 12, but underneath that they presented two distinct approaches to stopping the current violence in the region. Sharon emphasized that Israel is conducting a war on terror, stressing that completing the ongoing military operation is of the utmost importance. Powell was sympathetic to Israel's need to defend itself, but he emphasized finding a political answer to the conflict, one tied to a timetable for ending Israeli military operations.

The next days will determine whether Powell can bring about some semblance of relative calm, though it will be difficult to achieve much more than that. Powell is not likely to get a ceasefire without offering a political process, and such a process is unlikely to begin while military operations continue.

Form of Leverage Available to Powell

Powell has leverage with both parties. With Israel he has not only the close U.S.-Israel relationship, but also the fact - - apparent to both him and Sharon -- that the most Israel's military operations can produce is a respite from terror. The terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank is not a highly sophisticated infrastructure dependent on technology or large investments. It is a simple infrastructure that can be disrupted for a period of time but will likely be reconstituted. In order to turn the respite into something more profound, Sharon will need the United States.

Powell has leverage with Arafat as well, but this leverage will be totally undercut if Arafat thinks that he is indispensable and that the United States will save him, as happened in 1982. He will respond to U.S. demands only if he believes that Washington is prepared to sever ties with him if he once again fails to perform. For this reason, Powell should make clear that, from the Bush administration's standpoint, this is Chairman Arafat's last chance with

the United States. It is time for him to discredit terror as something that threatens the Palestinian cause. It is time for him to give unequivocal orders and to use his standing as the Palestinian leader in order to declare that those using violence are enemies of the Palestinian people.

Powell also has leverage with Arab leaders, who are not indifferent to the level of anger on their streets. These leaders need sustained, not episodic, U.S. engagement. Powell should emphasize that if Arab leaders want the United States to play a sustained role, they must fulfill their part by exhibiting a willingness to denounce terror and to lean on the Palestinians more systematically.

#### Options for Israel and the United States

Israel and the United States face three basic options:

- Bypass or exile Arafat. Neither the United States nor Israel can install a Palestinian leader; only the Palestinians can decide who will lead them and what their future will be. Yasir Arafat is a symbol of the Palestinian movement and a fixture on the landscape. Attempts to bypass or remove him would need to be accompanied by an offer of an equally revolutionary political strategy. Let there be no illusions that Israel or the United States could easily find an alternative to him. If Arafat were bypassed now, no Palestinian would step forward, for fear of being labeled either a traitor or a lackey. If the Israelis want to pursue this option, they must demonstrate unmistakably that Arafat is the primary obstacle to peace -- they must persuade the Palestinian people that a solution to the conflict exists, but that Arafat blocks any possibility of realizing it. To this end, Sharon should be prepared to adopt an approach that is clear in terms of promising negotiations. Such an approach must indicate that the Palestinians would receive most of the territories, but only if their leadership is prepared to fulfill its obligations and refrain from resorting to violence whenever it is dissatisfied.

- Timeline of obligations. Security, confidence-building measures, and political negotiations. In this option, Palestinian and Israeli obligations would be spelled out on a week-by-week basis. Political negotiations would begin by a specified date, and the United States would put the agenda of statehood, disengagement, and security arrangements on the table. In order to invest this agenda with greater meaning, the two sides could agree early on that a Palestinian state will be established by a certain date, after which negotiations about borders and powers vis-a-vis Israel would be conducted between juridical equals. Security and confidence-building obligations -- including Palestinian prevention of terror and incitement and Israeli pullback and freeze on settlement activity -- would be required and monitored. Consequences for nonperformance would be clearly established; in Arafat's case, diplomatic ties with him would be severed.

- Unilateral separation. This option is likely to emerge if neither of the above options proves possible. Unilateral separation represents the inability to conduct diplomacy. If it is unable to negotiate directly with the Palestinians, Israel would act unilaterally to improve its security situation. Proponents of this option suggest that Israel needs a coherent defense line. They critique a posture in which large numbers of soldiers must protect small numbers of settlers. Unilateral separation would involve withdrawal from isolated settlements and construction of a wall with buffer zones. In some places the wall would be consistent with the Green Line, and in others it would not.

Although this option is appealing at one level, there is the danger that it would confirm the Hizballah model that violence causes Israeli withdrawal. Unilateral separation can produce only a way station of sorts, wherein Israelis have greater security and are increasingly removed from the Palestinians and Palestinian life. If such a strategy is to provide stability even for an interim period, the United States must work with the Israelis as they shape a new defense line and remove themselves from the Palestinians. The objective must not be to make the new line permanent, but rather to signal to the Palestinians that violence will not create further Israeli withdrawal, and that they will have to assume their obligations and responsibilities if they want their aspirations to be addressed.

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