

# The Israeli-Palestinian Arena, Post-September 11

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## In-Depth Reports

**R**obert Satloff, The Washington Institute: President George W. Bush outlined a bold, new approach in his April 4 speech. Now Secretary of State Colin Powell is in the Middle East to implement it. How will the new approach fare?

Dennis Ross: That's a narrow question. (Laughter.) The essence of the president's speech was truth-telling. When it comes to the Middle East, because the region is so consumed by mythology, you are always better off when you engage in truth-telling. What Bush said to the Palestinians was, "You have a leader who has failed you, missed historic opportunities, and created a predicament that is of his own making. Suicide bombing will not serve your cause."

To the Israelis, he said, "You have a right to defend yourselves, but after you have done that, you still must have a political answer to the Palestinians."

And to the Arabs, Bush said, "It is good that you declare peaceful intent, but you cannot have your state-owned media glorifying suicide bombing, or there will be no peace, and there will be no success against terror. We want Arab leaders to assume their responsibilities, not only in terms of the broader effort on peace, but specifically in terms of helping with the Palestinians."

It was a very important message. But it was easier to state than it will be to carry out. Secretary Powell's first stop was Morocco. King Mohamed VI's public question was, "Why are you here and not in Jerusalem?" This demonstrates that while the United States might want Arab leaders to assume responsibility, there is a very strong impulse on their part to ensure that Washington carries the burden.

It will not be easy to get Arab leaders to assume that responsibility. They will insist that the secretary of state get the Israelis to withdraw. He, though, will make it clear that his capacity to do things depends upon their readiness to condemn terror in a public way, not privately, at a time when the climate in their own public makes them reluctant to do so.

The temptation on any trip like this is to settle for half measures -- to settle for steps that are symbolically useful but that do not practically alter the situation. We can claim success because everyone wants relative calm, but we may

quickly find ourselves right back in the soup -- with our credibility and ability to influence the situation reduced.

Satloff: I saw a lot of heads nodding when Dennis referred to half measures.

L. Paul (Jerry) Bremer: My concern with Secretary Powell's trip is the impact on the war against terrorism.

Washington has suffered a tactical defeat by sending Powell to the Middle East now. We have effectively given in to suicide terrorism. The situation can be salvaged, but there is a further strategic risk. If the end of the process involves Israel giving more than was offered at Camp David and Taba, then it will be a strategic victory for terrorism.

Why is this important? I believe very strongly that September 11 was more than just the world's worst terrorist attack. September 11 represents the most serious threat to American national security in the early twenty-first century, not only because it was the culmination of trends that have been observable in terrorism for the last decade -- trends toward mass-casualty terrorism -- but also because it reflects the reality of America's geopolitical domination.

The United States is today more dominant than any country in recorded history. The lesson of the Gulf War was that America is not vulnerable to conventional attack. The United States cannot be defeated conventionally, and therefore, people who hate us must resort to unconventional, asymmetric warfare. September 11 demonstrated this threat to U.S. national security. President Bush was absolutely right in his speech to Congress on September 20 when he said that defending against this threat is the organizing principle of American foreign policy.

If we get blown off course on that strategic approach to our national security policy, then the situation in the Middle East will be only one part of a larger problem. It will not even be the major part. We will have difficulty getting to the major security threat in the region, which is not the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but Iraq.

Frederic C. Hof: We have seen a fundamental change in the last few days. If I had been asked at eleven o'clock in the morning on April 4 whether the Mitchell Commission report was of any relevance to events, I would have answered no. Twenty minutes later, I would have had a different answer entirely.

Since the report was issued in May 2001, the administration has emphasized one aspect of it: the unconditional, total, and absolute condemnation of terrorism. Speaking as a member of that commission, it is extraordinarily regrettable that the Palestinian side did not, at the outset, implement our recommendations concerning the condemnation of terrorism. From our point of view, this was not something to be produced in the course of negotiations with Israel. (By the same token, one might say that an Israeli settlement freeze does not necessarily have to be produced in the course of negotiations.) Now the president is emphasizing both sides of this equation, the terrorism side and the need for a political context.

Samuel Lewis: First, I would like to reassure my old friend Jerry. There is no danger of the Palestinians being offered more than they were offered by the Clinton administration. You do not have worry about that. (Laughter.)

I am very worried about this mission. I admire the president's April 4 speech. His truth-telling point is valuable. But this speech should have been made twelve months ago, or ten months ago, right after the Mitchell Report.

It seems to me that at this stage, the secretary is going to have to settle for half measures. And he will be lucky to get half measures; he cannot come back totally empty handed. He can get more than a ceasefire, I suspect, if he is prepared to do something this administration has successfully avoided until now: lay out a vision for the long-term outcome. Reinvigorating a political process or proposing a negotiating track now will require more American control over that process, with American ideas at the center of the track.

My old adversary and protagonist, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon, has the bit in his teeth right now, very much as he did in 1982. His tactics with regard to the United States are very similar to those he used in 1982, although there is a bit more honey, and a good deal less unpleasantness, in his style.

But he is not going to withdraw until the army tells him that they have done as much as they can. He will find a million ways to stall, to go at his own pace, to give Powell just enough, to say nice things to Bush -- because he knows, as does everyone, that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had been preparing this operation for a long while. They were anxious to carry it out and had been restrained by political and diplomatic exigencies from doing so. Now that they have an opportunity to clean out the terrorist infrastructure -- as they define it -- to stop without having done all they can do would invite the wrath, not only of the right, but of the IDF leadership itself. That is not a political prospect that any prime minister would want to face.

So this mission will end with something, but not a lot, and it will end before the withdrawals are complete. It will also leave behind the results of the Israeli incursions for someone else to cope with on another trip.

Satloff: One element of the president's speech was revolutionary, to say the least. The president talked about failed Palestinian leadership, making a sharp distinction between the incumbent Palestinian leader and the Palestinian people. In his April comments, Bush referred to the need for the Palestinian leadership to rise to the occasion -- without personally calling on the chairman himself.

Bush said, "As Israel steps back, responsible Palestinian leaders and Israel's Arab neighbors must step forward and show the world that they are truly on the side of peace. The choice and the burden will be theirs." This suggests that he is thinking of, if not a post--Yasir Arafat solution, then what Ehud Ya'ari calls a "bypass plan" to get around Arafat. Is this a reasonable policy? Can it be achieved?

Ross: Is it a reasonable policy and is it an achievable policy? The two may not be the same. You might have a reasonable policy that is not feasible. You have to make a decision. You will work with Arafat, or you will not work with Arafat. The idea that you can get Arab leaders to take his place is a complete illusion. I know of no leader who is prepared to do that.

We presented the Clinton ideas to five Arab leaders, whose first reaction was positive. But when Arafat rejected the ideas, they did too. At this point, no Arab leader will put himself in a position where Arafat can stand up and say, "You are betraying the Palestinians." Is it desirable for Arab leaders to assume greater responsibility? Absolutely. It should be a ground rule for Washington that if Arab leaders want sustained American involvement, they will have to assume a different level of responsibility than they have in the past.

That leaves the issue of whether or not you deal with Arafat. Notwithstanding the president's speech, it is very clear that on this mission, the secretary of state will be talking to the chairman. The administration was coy about it initially, but you can guarantee that Middle Eastern leaders who meet with the secretary before he visits Israel will pressure him to meet with Arafat.

How many chances can you give Arafat? Well, if you follow the logic of Bush's speech, this absolutely, positively must be the last chance. Otherwise, the words are completely meaningless. You cannot constantly say, "We call on Arafat to do more." We keep calling on him to do more, and he never does. Why should he change his behavior if there is never a consequence? At some point, you have to create a structure of accountability with specific requirements for both sides.

If Arafat does not fulfill his promises this time, then the administration has to conclude that he is no longer a partner they can work with. They will have created a structure that the whole world can see, one which will show that the break with Arafat is not arbitrary. The administration will be able to say, "Here is the structure. Here are the obligations. Here are the promises. Here is the day-by-day monitoring. Here is the performance versus the commitment, and we can no longer sustain a relationship with him." This course of action would follow the logic of the Bush speech, given the fact that on this trip, the secretary of state will likely be meeting with Arafat.

Lewis: As long as Arafat is alive, he will be someone you cannot work around. His expulsion from Israel would

change the ground rules only slightly. None of his nowbattered lieutenants would dare take authority from him, even if he were in Tunis. This is the dilemma. Everyone understands that were he to be killed or commit suicide, he would become a martyr. That could be explosive for American interests, and perhaps for Israeli interests, throughout the region.

Bremer: I agree with Dennis. The strategic problem with Arafat is that he remembers 1970, when he escaped. He remembers 1982, when he escaped. He remembers being brought back from isolation in 1993, and now he sees this as yet another opportunity for escape. We face the problem of making him see that this really is his last chance. How do you make that threat credible to a guy who has escaped so many times in the past? This is the challenge.

And this really does have to be the last time, which in turn means that the Bush administration will be faced, for the first time, with a question of internal discipline. They will be offered half measures. And they will have to say, "We do not accept half measures." This has got to be the end of the line.

Lewis: If you make this the end of the line for Arafat as far as the United States is concerned, will the rest of the world follow suit? Do you think we run the world well enough to do that?

Bremer: It is not a question of the United States running the world. It is a question of operating consistently within the policies the president has outlined post - September 11 vis-a-vis terrorism and the Middle East. He gave a great speech in April, but he has to mean what he said. If he does not, then our troubles extend far beyond those in the Middle East.

Hof: I agree with Ambassador Lewis. As long as Arafat lives and breathes, you have to deal with him. For thirty-five years, he has single-mindedly accumulated power even on the most trivial of matters, right down to the issue of who within the Palestinian Authority (PA) gets a telephone. There is no single person, there is no combination of people, that can replicate his position atop the pyramid of Palestinian politics. There is no way, when you get right down to it, that you can administratively erase Arafat, and say, "We will not deal with him." I just do not see the feasibility of deadlines and ultimatums.

What can we do? We can push for accountability. We can certainly try to organize other leaders in the region to put pressure on him to say something useful -- and more importantly, to do something useful about the question of terrorism. I fear a great deal of time will be wasted trying to work around Yasir Arafat.

Ross: If there is no point in imposing consequences on Arafat -- which is the thrust of what you say when you conclude that you cannot bypass him -- we are telling everyone, most importantly Arafat, that he is indispensable. In that circumstance, Arafat will not change his behavior. In fact, he will up the ante. He probably will not even go for a ceasefire. He will say, "You must pay me for a ceasefire." If that is the case, then we had better start redefining our objectives.

If the Bush administration draws the conclusion that it will not be able to affect Arafat very much, then it must adopt what I would call a "muddle-through" strategy. The muddle-through strategy is to try to calm the situation enough to create some kind of respite. The calm will be broken from time to time, but you use the calm as a device to take on Iraq.

In the muddle-through strategy, we do not solve anything between Israelis and Palestinians. We merely try to damp things down. We have someone constantly on the ground holding feet to the fire to get enough performance so that the unending terror and violence, the cycle of anger and revenge, is controlled.

If you do not think that this is a tenable strategy, then I see two alternatives. One is a bypass approach, but it is a bypass approach designed to make it clear that Arafat was the obstacle to an agreement. The only way to do that is by having this Israeli government prepared to embrace a highly credible approach to the Palestinians, one that goes at

least as far as the Camp David proposals.

If that does not work, then the Israelis will inevitably move toward unilateral separation as a way of doing what they can to create their own security. The muddlethrough approach will not provide it. If you choose the muddle-through approach, then you really have to decide that regime change is your objective. It must be a short-term objective because you will find that the environment will slip away, and you will be held hostage.

Satloff: Let me step away from the meaning of Bush's speech to ask, "Why now?" A great deal of reportage has focused on the idea that the president's involvement has less to do with violence in the West Bank than on perceived instability around the Arab world.

It seems to me that after many months of private entreaties and letters from the Saudis suggesting something just short of blackmail, what finally got the Bush administration to jump in with both feet were the pictures of angry demonstrations in Amman, in Cairo, in Manama.

Some of these pictures reflected real dangers on the ground, especially those from Jordan. But the message has not been lost on Arab leaders about what moves this administration to act. I suspect that the lesson, several months down the line, might be that this is how one can lever the administration into greater engagement with the Middle East.

What lessons can be drawn from the fact that the president has deepened his engagement in this issue because of the regional dynamic?

Lewis: This conversation is very interesting; we've now talked for about half an hour and the word "Israel" has barely been mentioned, except by me. It really is time to think about what is possible from the Israeli side.

If Powell's trip fails, one of the options would be to try to get a credible peace proposal out of the Israeli government that would wean away some of the Palestinians -- and a lot of the Europeans, incidentally -- from Arafat himself.

But as I look at the way Israel's politics are evolving, I am struck by the sense of despair among those who might have endorsed such an idea and thought it possible even a year ago. Reaction to suicide bombers, in particular, has really shaken Israeli society to its core. The center is now part of the right, in terms of the lack of trust in any Palestinian negotiator -- not just Arafat.

Prime Minister Sharon's move this week to bring the National Religious Party, led by its new leader, Gen. Rafi Eitan, into government along with David Levy and, probably, eventually, the National Union, means that the cabinet will tilt much further to the right. The Labor Party may not be able to hang in there very much longer under those circumstances. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is wily. He does not want to leave. Binyamin Ben-Eliezer wants to stay in also, as long as he remains defense minister, but the pressures on Labor to pull out will probably be too great to resist. The idea that any Sharon government with that coalition will endorse anything like Ambassador Ross's second alternative is just fantasy.

Maybe, just maybe, after the next election -- but if Binyamin Netanyahu sticks to his current line, not even then. Everyone to whom I have spoken in Israel is convinced that Netanyahu will be the next prime minister. It is just a foregone conclusion, including among Laborites, and that presents a nice picture of how much flexibility the Bush administration will have in the near future.

Satloff: Sam, are we on the verge of a U.S.-Israel crisis?

Lewis: No, we are not on the verge.

Satloff: Are we in one?

Lewis: No, we are not. (Laughter.) One might erupt, but we are not in one now.

Bremer: Following the logic of what you are saying, that kind of Israeli government would not embrace unilateral separation, even though the vast majority of the Israeli public wants it. Sharon has a lot of support for what he is doing right now because it looks like an appropriate military response to six suicide attacks in six days, but this will at best create a respite for the Israelis. The question becomes, "What will the Sharon government do with that respite?"

If there is no possibility of a meaningful political initiative, if the alternative is the kind of muddle-through approach that cannot be satisfying, even the Sharon government will be driven toward unilateral separation with some difficult decisions about where to draw the lines. It means drawing a line away from settlements that require large numbers of soldiers to protect a small numbers of settlers.

Satloff: I now turn the floor over to questions for our panel.

Rand H. Fishbein, Fishbein Associates: Ambassador Ross, you began your remarks by saying that the president's comments last week hinged on truth-telling. Wasn't that what Oslo was all about? And yet, for eight years, the State Department told us that things were fine, when in fact they were not fine. Virtually every report the State Department sent to Congress deemphasized the Palestinians' acquisition of arms, playing down the fact that they had crossed the threshold set in the Oslo Accords.

Incitement to violence continued unabated, yet the State Department deemphasized that in its reports. There was a spate of suicide bombings in 1996, yet that was downplayed. Congress was told that the bombing campaign was an aberration, that it was caused by rogue elements within the PA, or outside the PA, but was not directed by Arafat himself, when, in fact, it was.

So, my question to you is, given this rather ignoble history during the last eight or nine years, do you feel that the State Department is, in part, responsible for what has occurred over the last twelve to sixteen months?

Satloff: I thought we should start with a soft question. Dennis? (Laughter.)

Ross: I reject the premise of the question. You cannot say that the United States is responsible for what happens in this arena. And I wouldn't indict the State Department any more than I would indict the American government. I don't believe the focus should be on our responsibility. The United States is not responsible for the violence; Arafat is responsible. We are responsible for the kind of involvement that we have, and we should learn lessons from the past.

However, you can say that there was no accountability. A major mistake of the last decade was that preserving the process took on a life of its own. But this happened not only because of attitudes at the State Department. The Israelis also saw promise in the process. They too looked at the five agreements. They too saw Palestinian noncompliance. A year before the current intifada erupted, Israel, for the first time in its history, did not suffer a single fatality from terror. That was because the Palestinians were actually doing their jobs.

Did the Palestinians ever completely fulfill their obligations? Absolutely not. Should they have? Absolutely. Should we have had accountability? Should the United States have withheld its own involvement in the process until it saw accountability? You bet. That is one of the lessons to be learned. There should be ground rules when we go into a process like this, so that the process itself does not become more important than the objective.

We are now experiencing the consequences of the absence of accountability. That is why I say that interaction with Arafat without accountability, based on the premise that there is no alternative, guarantees no change in his behavior. It guarantees no results. It guarantees at best some periods of relative calm, or periods that will seem to have been calm in light of the difficult times that will follow.

Participant: Why did the United States not allow the Israelis to kill Arafat? Not having him around might give us an opportunity to deal with someone else. But as long as he is around, the likelihood of our accomplishing anything is

very small.

Satloff: That is a simple, straightforward question. Why not pay the price? Will that cost be less than the cost of having to go through additional years of Arafat's leadership?

Lewis: I would make a slightly different point. From Sharon's point of view, the tactical mistake was not going in, grabbing Arafat right away, and putting him on a plane. The next morning, everyone would have awakened with Arafat in Marrakesh.

Satloff: Marrakesh? Property values in Tunis just dropped. (Laughter.)

Lewis: There would probably have been a twenty-four-hour news story about the outrageous Israeli move to exile him. And yes, he would have become the Flying Dutchman, as he was in Tunis, but it would have been a better way to solve the problem. Killing him is a different matter.

Satloff: As the professional historian on this panel, I must point out that there is one historic model here, which is, of course, what happened to the Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini. Haj Amin was the Arafat of his day in the 1930s and 1940s, but he died in oblivion traveling the world, looking for supporters. He died alone, irrelevant, in 1974. It may not be a directly analogous situation, but how we can turn Arafat into the Mufti is at least an important theoretical question.

Hof: My sense is that the government of Israel has decided, for perfectly proper reasons, not to pursue either death or exile, simply because it does not know what the consequences of either would be. Decisionmaking in the PA, which is not all that efficient now, would be decentralized to a point where there would be no accountability whatsoever.

The post-Arafat era is beginning to unfold, regardless of the fact that this fellow is trapped in a room. Power is beginning to drift away from him, down to the young men with guns, down to the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, down to the Tanzim, down to these sorts of people. Arafat's style is to try to accommodate that, to dominate it. Arafat is not Stalin. He is not Hitler. He is a consensus guy. He will continue to be the center of gravity in Palestinian politics for some time, but the steady leaking of power away from him will continue.

Lewis: Let me be a little disruptive and go back to Jerry's opening remarks. He says that the terror project, which the president has made the theme of his administration, is all that really matters. The Middle East, per se, and the problem that four or five administrations have wrestled with in that region, is a subordinate clause. Other U.S. interests in the region pale before the worldwide battle against terror. But I would argue that terror is a tactic, not a goal, and the issue is how you diminish the use of this tactic.

There was a very interesting article in the Washington Post on April 8 by Sebastian Mallaby. He describes the problem of administrations coming to office with blackand- white principles, usually drawn from the campaign, and then having to deal with a world that is not black and white but filled with shades of gray.

The problem of dealing with the grays in the Middle East inevitably requires a different approach toward terror, which is the product of a self-determination drive that has gone on for a generation. The intifada is not terror for terror's sake. It has a purpose.

Bremer: Well, it depends on which terrorists you are talking about. That is narrowly true of Palestinian terrorists. That is not true of the terrorists who attacked the United States on September 11 and who represent a major threat to America.

Therefore, I agree with what the president said. Fighting terror really is the organizing principle for our foreign policy, and I am reminded of that other simplistic American president, Ronald Reagan, who had the guts to say that the Soviet Union was evil. He was roundly criticized by the cognoscenti in Washington. They said, "What a simple

idea! You want to base your whole foreign policy on the idea that the Soviet Union is evil?" But Reagan turned out to be right. The Soviet Union was evil, and in fact, it went away.

There is something to be said for clarity in presidential leadership, and Bush laid it down clearly on September 20. I agree with you that he is now being pressed to find some nuances. If the president treats his current involvement, as Ambassador Ross suggested, simply as a means of quieting down the Israeli-Palestinian situation so that he can get at his grand strategy of regime change in Iraq, then this is not a bad idea. But that requires the administration to be extremely disciplined now, to retain its clarity of vision.

Hof: There are all kinds of explanations for the phenomenon of terrorism. At the end of the day, there are no excuses for it. The deliberate targeting of civilians on a random basis to produce terror for political ends is fundamentally evil. We can understand why the phenomenon takes place. We can understand that in a political context, it may be mitigated, or even eliminated over time, but the evil of the phenomenon is not something we should skip over. We need to be explicit in discussing it in those terms.

Ross: We are at a juncture with the Palestinians in this regard because there are those who have embraced the Hizballah model. They have embraced it with what I would say is not a limited objective. They really believe they can get rid of Israel. Those who embrace terrorism with a more limited objective may be in a different category, but you must demonstrate that violence does not pay. If you do not, then peacemaking will become impossible. The United States must somehow show that terrorists will not be rewarded. If it appears that the only thing that moves us is fear of violence, suddenly terrorism becomes a valuable currency.

Morton Kondracke, FOX News: What happens if the Netanyahu policy is instituted? That is to say, expel Arafat, demolish the PA, and impose separation.

Lewis: The Israeli military will likely have to reimpose the kind of occupation regime they had twenty years ago. A fence takes a long time to build, and in the meantime, a chaotic situation will be left behind in the territories. Today, in fact, Saeb Erekat said definitively that the Palestinian Authority is no more. It has been destroyed. Perhaps this is a bit of an overstatement, but the PA has come pretty close to being destroyed. The institutions, and many of the buildings, are in ruins. Israel might face this situation before Netanyahu is elected.

If Israel is in the early stages of a separation policy with a fence, buffers, and so on, and if there is a chaotic, feudal situation with Palestinian power devolving into many different hands, there is bound to be a renewal of suicide bombings. If so, the fence will not be built. Therefore, Israel must have a thorough occupation. It must have a lot of troops stationed in the territories for the foreseeable future.

At the same time, Israel would be threatened from Lebanon, and would be diplomatically isolated. It might also be hit by some tough sanctions from the Europeans. Netanyahu would not be facing a very pretty picture, if he has this game plan and is there to carry it out.

Hof: If Yasir Arafat wanted to give the kind of speech that President Bush has demanded of him, if he wanted to crack down on some of the worst terrorist elements, including those in the Fatah organization, he would have, at best, a slim chance of pulling it off. That is the most you can say, but it is ten thousand times what you can say for any other individual or group of individuals in the Palestinian political arena.

Satloff: Everyone is in for a tough time, over the next one, two, or five years. Would it be reasonable to conclude that it might be better to have different Palestinian leadership with perhaps a better outcome, than to suffer through a tough time and wind up stuck with the same leadership that created the problems in the first place?

Ross: In the end, if the objective is to bypass Arafat, the Israelis have to make it clear that he was the obstacle to peace. The only way they can make this point is by being prepared to offer something that is highly credible. Absent

that, they cannot mobilize sufficient support.

Sharon would have to say, "We have been driven to use force not because we wanted to. We have been driven to use force because we understand that there are those Palestinians who believe the only way to deal with us is through terror and violence, and they think we will submit to that. We will not. We understand that Palestinians will not submit to force either. There can only be a political solution. We are prepared to do X."

Even if they go this route, they will not instantly sidestep Arafat because there is no immediately available alternative. But at least they have created a solution, and over time, those who might replace Arafat can gravitate to that solution. Alternatively, to try the options that Netanyahu is talking about will produce the scenario that Sam describes.

Mohammed Wahby, al-Mussawar: So far, I have heard no reference on this panel to President Bush's stated expectation that Prime Minister Sharon withdraw without delay. He emphasized this repeatedly. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice went even further.

Second, I would refer to two wars, one in 1948, one in 1973. In 1948, one side was totally victorious, and the other side was totally defeated. In 1973, America was determined that neither side would emerge totally victorious or totally defeated. What happened? Within four years of the 1948 defeat, there was a series of very quick coup d'etats everywhere -- in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. The landscape changed as a result. After 1973, the biggest and strongest Arab country made peace with Israel because there was an equilibrium.

Finally, can you really fight terrorism effectively without the Arab world collaborating with you? You cannot isolate Palestine from the Arab world. I just returned from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. You cannot imagine the bitterness. America has to enlist the support of these people. You are dreaming if you think you can go it alone against Saddam Husayn.

Bremer: Sharon will not be completely responsive to the president's demand for a withdrawal because if the IDF is not satisfied with the results of the operation, it will be too costly politically for him to withdraw. He will try to appear responsive while maintaining the operation.

As for your second point, it is an illusion to think that a military victory can be translated into a political victory. In the end, military steps can buy a period of respite, but no more than that. I know something about the infrastructure of terror. It is disrupted now, but it will not take a long time to rebuild. Parts of it may well have been destroyed, but these parts are not so technologically significant that they are difficult to rebuild, and the people needed to carry out terrorist acts will be recruited in time.

In the end, you must have a political approach. If there is no political process, then there will be unilateral separation. Even that will not be the end of the story. It will be a way station until you can get back at some point to a political process.

Lewis: Mohammed, if you were really being tough with your wife, and you wanted to tell her to do something, would you say, "Do it," or would you say, "I expect that you will do it"? The United States has a very peculiar kind of relationship with Israel. American presidents do not talk to Israeli prime ministers in the language of orders. Secretary Powell said it the other day: "The president doesn't give orders to a sovereign prime minister of another country." But Washington does tell them quite firmly what it would like them to do. Bush did, and Sharon heard him, but the prime minister also has other pressures.

Satloff: The 1948 war did not end in total Israeli victory. The mere fact of where the 1948 boundary lines were drawn suggests that the Jordanians fought very well, which is why they ended up with the West Bank and half of Jerusalem. The results were that the king of Jordan negotiated a peace with Israel and was assassinated for it.

Janine Zacharia, Jerusalem Post: With all due respect to the U.S. officials in the room, how does the Bush administration get out in front again? Their Middle East policy over the past couple of months has seemed pretty reactive, spineless, and short term.

Satloff: You don't like it, I gather? (Laughter.)

Zacharia: I just don't understand it. After the Passover suicide bombing in Netanya, the United States announced its support for Israel's right to self-defense, and within three days, Washington was urging Israel to get out, telling them that the approach was not going to work.

How does Secretary Powell credibly threaten Arafat, saying, "We really will make you irrelevant this time," when Israel locks him up in a compound and the rest of the world worries about whether he has enough food to eat? Everything is so short term. A few days before the Arab summit, Washington was concerned about how to convince the Israelis to let Arafat go to the summit. So we offered them a meeting with Vice President Dick Cheney, which backfired. It just seems aimless.

Ross: You have summarized my concerns rather succinctly. (Laughter.) The problem is that we have been accommodating terrorism, and, as I said at the outset, terrorism has had tactical success by getting us reengaged. How do you change Arafat's way of thinking?

It will be very hard. Unless we are prepared to say that this is really his last chance, and after that we will not deal with him, then we are in strategic trouble -- on this particular issue and on the broader counterterrorism fight.

Lewis: A little history is important here. In 1982, the United States saved Arafat from extinction, got various governments to accept his troops, and got the Tunisians to take him in, after the Egyptians and everyone else said, "We want no part of him." He must think Washington will do the same thing again, no matter what Sharon does to him.

Ross: I agree. We have unfortunately conveyed that message. My own experience with Arafat suggests that he never moves unless he understands that he has no other option. If you leave him with a choice, if you make him feel indispensable, if you let him think that we will save him, then there will be no possibility of moving him. We will be playing his game, and we will end up directing pressure toward the Israelis, not toward him.

We have to decide what our objective is. If our objective is muddling through because we want to create an environment that gives us a chance to accomplish regime change in Iraq, that leads us down one track. If our objective is to change the fundamentals of the Israel-Palestinian issue, putting Iraq to one side because we will have to deal with it eventually, that puts in the position of having to tell Arafat, in no uncertain terms, that this is his last chance.

Satloff: On that note, gentlemen -- a note that says, "Define your objectives. Know where you are going, otherwise you will neither know how to get there nor know when you have arrived" -- we conclude this discussion. ❖

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## RECOMMENDED

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Feb 15, 2022



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