

Israel's Search for Peace and Security: Lessons of the Past, Options for the Future

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Brief Analysis

On July 19, 2001, former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following are excerpts from his remarks. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=30\)](#)

"I will . . . make some telegraphic remarks about why I believe we are facing now the kind of violence that we are facing, what could or should be done about it from my point of view, and what is the longer term prospect for what will happen in the Middle East. . . .

"Why are we facing this violence? Since Chairman Arafat decided deliberately to turn to violence. . . . He decided [this] when he realized at Camp David exactly a year ago we had a moment of truth where real tough, painful decisions were needed on both sides, not just plain or smooth talk.

"He realized that he does not have the character of a Palestinian Sadat, a Palestinian King Hussein, or a Palestinian de Gaulle for that matter. He understood that he has only two choices: step in and take tough and painful decisions on behalf of the Palestinian people in exchange for the tough and painful decisions that I would have to take on behalf of the Israeli people; or, avoid stepping in and risk losing the support of the world. . . .

"Arafat realized that world leaders are ready to back an Israeli government that is ready to take the risks of entering into a dialogue . . . and that the world is ready to back such an Israeli government in its intention to stop the unilateral transfer of assets to the other side when we don't know where are we heading. . . .

"I think that the basic instincts of President Bush, Congress, and Secretary of State Powell about standing firm against terror are right and will produce long-term results, much more profound than meets the eye. The determination, insistence, that Arafat live up to all his commitments in the ceasefire agreements is essential. The world should not sway from holding thugs and rogue leaders accountable for their behavior.

"I still remember an American administration negotiating with representatives of [Serbian leader Slobodan] Milosevic a few years ago at Dayton, Ohio, but when it became clear that he had turned to ethnic cleansing and other atrocities, he found himself in The Hague.

"I still recall an American hero, later a presidential candidate, Bob Dole, negotiating or dealing with Saddam Husayn, and I believe that he was not the only one. Jesse Jackson did it, and of course April Glaspie did it on behalf of the American administration. But when it became clear that he [Saddam] intended to eliminate a neighboring country from the map, maybe from history, Bush Sr., [then-Secretary of Defense Dick] Cheney, and [then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] Powell knew exactly what they should do, and the American people backed them—in fact, the whole world and most of the Arab world, except Arafat, backed them. The same applied in different moments to [Libyan leader Muammar] Qadhafi, to [North Korean president] Kim Il-Song, to [Osama] bin Laden. And Arafat . . . should not be able to get away with it.

"Terror is not going to be just a challenge for Israel. . . . It is going to become a major challenge for this country, as well as for Europe. . . . And the only way, to the best of my judgment, to deal with this worldwide web of terror is to stand firm and to treat them the same way that our ancestors used to deal with the piracy of the high seas; namely, to fully coordinate operational, intelligence, and diplomatic efforts; not let them land at any port, or airport for that matter; and immediately isolate them from the family of normal, benign nations. . . .

"For the time being, I believe that Israel is doing the right thing; namely, focusing on hitting those individuals who are directly involved in leading acts of terror against our citizens and, at the same time, doing our best to convince honest people and honest leaders in the leading democracies—and the other parts of the world as well—about the need to stand firm. . . .

"Beneath the surface, underneath the symptoms of the apparent threat to Israel—namely terror, conventional arms, ground-to-ground missiles, and even future nuclear devices in the hands of some Arab or Muslim countries—there lie more profound threats, which are of two sorts: one which I call the Bosnian-Belfast kind of threat, or communities bleeding for centuries without any solution in sight; and the other is what I call the South African threat, namely either apartheid or the threat of a binational state.

"And the only common response to these two threats is to be tough enough and determined enough to shape a border for Israel within which we will have a solid Jewish majority for generations to come, in a way that will secure and assure Israelis about their direction, their identity. . . . Of course it is preferable to have such an agreement with the Palestinians, to have this engagement through an agreement, but we cannot impose it on the other side and we cannot afford to paralyze ourselves if there is no partner. So even if we have to take steps unilaterally, I believe this is the only way: to announce that we are going to shape the future borders of Israel in a way that will include more than 80 percent of the settlers, a certain strip along the Jordan River that will be needed in this situation as a basic security zone vis-à-vis the eastern front, and certain sites on the mountainous ridge for communication and intelligence. But all of these together should not cover more than, at most, 20 percent of the whole territory. . . . By saying this, we are signaling a positive strategy for Israel. We are signaling our vision for how Israel will look in four, five, or six years.

"Now, the second essential pillar for such a strategy is leaving the door wide open for the Palestinians to resume negotiations without any preconditions beyond the absence of violence, based on the ideas of Camp David. . . . We have our own vision of Israel: a Jewish, solid, self-confident democracy. We are going to begin to establish it. We are not finalizing it for the Palestinians. We leave it open. The moment they are ready, they can join without any precondition beyond the absence of violence. . . .

"I do not want you to get me wrong. I did not plan this effort to come to Camp David in order to trick Arafat and expose him. I was genuinely, bona fide, ready to take quite far-reaching, calculated risks in order to know whether we had a partner, and even further calculated risks in order to reach an agreement that would put an end to the conflict if the partner was a genuine one. But now that we have discovered that he is not that character, we should be able to tell our people the truth. And I believe that every government should be able to tell its people the truth. Democracies especially cannot afford this kind of dissonance between what the intelligence community knows to be the reality and what leaders feel free to tell the people."

These excerpts were prepared by Rachel Stroumsa.

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