

# Time for an Accounting

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## Articles & Testimony

Secretary of State Colin Powell returned from the Middle East having won agreement between Israelis and Palestinians for a seven-day period of calm before a six-week cooling off period is to begin. But there is no calm. The violence continues daily, with each side accusing the other of violations.

Without calm, there will be no cooling-off period and no resumption of negotiations. Without calm, the deterioration will continue, the pain will continue and the suffering will continue. Only the pursuit of peace will not continue.

Every effort to stop the violence has failed. There have been agreements and commitments, but none has held. Last fall we reached agreement for mutual steps to stabilize the situation first in meetings with then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Chairman Yasser Arafat in Paris. Then there was the summit agreement in Sharm el-Sheik. Then there was the understanding between Shimon Peres and the chairman in November.

While violence subsided from time to time after these agreements and before the Israeli elections, it never stopped for more than a few days. In the past few months, the violence has escalated, with increasing casualties on both sides. Arafat declared a cease-fire after the bombing in Tel Aviv claimed the lives of 20 Israeli teenagers. He understood this bombing had done great damage to the Palestinian cause internationally, and he acted to minimize the damage. Again, the violence abated, but for only a few days. George Tenet was sent into the breach, and he brokered a work plan for implementing the cease-fire. But there has been no cessation of hostilities.

Secretary Powell understandably believes we cannot simply try a new idea every two weeks. But some in the administration are apparently pushing the idea that we should set a deadline for calm to be established, and if it is not, declare that neither side is serious and that we will do no more until they prove their seriousness. While attractive for seemingly putting the onus on Israelis and Palestinians and giving us a reason to walk away, this, too, would fail. With such a pronouncement the violence would surely worsen. Such a pronouncement cannot work because, by equating the two sides, it ensures that neither bears responsibility. They will simply blame one another.

If we want to see an end to violence, there needs to be accountability. There needs to be a clear understanding that we will, at a certain point, publicly say which side has been performing and which side has not -- or at least which side is doing a better job of carrying out the commitments it has made.

Both sides have demonstrated their sensitivity to public opinion internationally. It is time to recognize that and use it as leverage to produce performance, rather than an exchange of charges and countercharges. To be credible in leveling our own charges regarding lack of performance, we should create a clear structure of accountability. The commitments have been made to us; we know the elements of the Tenet work plan and we should evaluate performance on a daily basis.

In practical terms that means that the American-Israeli-Palestinian security committee should meet every night; each day's events would be discussed to compare performance to commitments; where there is a gap between performance and existing commitments, steps would be identified to eliminate the gap and fulfill the commitments; each side would be told that daily reports are to be sent to the secretary of state, and that within two weeks, the secretary is to announce his judgment as to who is performing and who is not. It would be understood that he would share his assessment with the Europeans, Russians and others over the course of the two weeks -- something that would maximize the impact of the assessment and likely produce further pressure for performance.

Given my experience with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Chairman Arafat, I believe this offers the only chance at this point to see calm actually restored. Sharon gives his commitments only reluctantly, because he expects to be held accountable for every commitment he makes. Conversely, Arafat has spent a lifetime giving commitments that he assumes he will never have to fulfill. It is time for that to change.

Holding both accountable will create an incentive to perform. More important, it is the best guarantee to both that they will get what each feels he needs. Sharon needs to see calm restored, to show his public that violence was not rewarded and that the Palestinians actually began to change their behavior before anything was required of Israel. Arafat needs to know that if he cracks down and imposes order, Sharon will fulfill his responsibilities not only in the Tenet plan but also on all the elements of the Mitchell report, including on settlement activity. Arafat doubts that, but if a structure of accountability is created now, it can serve as a precedent for each phase of the process. Arafat always says he asks only for the "accurate implementation" of agreements. Why not put that to the test?

Our mistake during the Oslo process was not creating a structure of accountability. Obligations went unfulfilled with no consequence, with blame never apportioned. Our belief in the promise of the process, the concern about disruption of it and the judgment that everything would be settled in the endgame led us to overlook or rationalize behavior that violated the letter and the spirit of the Oslo agreements.

If there is to be any hope for the future, it is time to put both sides on notice that all commitments will be taken seriously now and that for our part we will no longer avoid public comment on who is living up to his obligations and who is not.

The writer was director for policy planning in the State Department under President George H. W. Bush and special Middle East coordinator under President Clinton. He is currently counselor for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. ❖

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