

Challenges Facing Israel Abroad and at Home

Jun 25, 2001



Brief Analysis

Despite the violence and terror of the past months, 60 percent of Israelis are still ready to make painful compromises in order to achieve peace-if they see that they have a viable partner. The Israelis have already decided that in order to live in peace they will need to make a compromise with their history. The kind of restrained leadership Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has shown since the formation of this government indicates that the message of painful compromises for real peace is the policy of the State of Israel. Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Yasir Arafat has not yet come to the same point. He is not yet ready to make a compromise with his own Palestinian or Islamic history in order to live respectfully in peace alongside Israel. It will be virtually impossible to restart negotiations without understanding what happened in the negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Only knowing what occurred will allow the parties to avoid the mistakes of the past -- and there were real mistakes on both sides. Abba Eban once said that the Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity, and the Palestinians have lived up to this expectation. They did not understand the greatness of the moment that Camp David presented and therefore approached the talks with a negative, aggressive, and violent energy-which quickly replaced the dynamic of the past six to eight years. To understand what this means, consider how Arafat reacted to Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount last September. Arafat had two options: he could have greeted Sharon, showing his people and the world that the PA would guarantee freedom of access and of worship, and therefore could be counted on to provide all the benefits of peace; or he could exploit the visit in order to ignite the region. Arafat chose the second option.

Dimensions of Confusion

The peace camp has proven to Israeli society and the world that occupation cannot be a long-term strategy for the state of Israel. But after the collapse of the Oslo process, the Israeli left wing also realized that the end of occupation would not mark the beginning of an eternally friendly peace. The left became aware that a warm peace is not sustainable in the reality of the Middle East and that there is no "new Middle East" in the foreseeable future. Realizing that peace is not at hand, the left has little idea about what can follow the end of occupation.

On the other side, the right wing has realized that tanks, guns, and power cannot overcome a people's national motivation, and with this comes the recognition that there is no military solution. Nevertheless, the right has not yet presented a viable basis for a permanent settlement to the dispute.

Faced with such confusion on both sides, the national unity government has become a source of strategic inner strength; its formation was not just a tactical move. This government has introduced a new and unanticipated policy of restraint. No one expected to hear from Sharon phrases like "restraint is power" or "the true hero is the one who controls his passions." The Israeli public is buying this powerful message and gives the government 70 percent support.

The existence of the national unity government is secure as long as it adheres to two fundamental principles: military restraint and the continuation of political initiatives for peace. Israel should not consider going back to a military solution, an approach that has proven unsuccessful. Nor should Israel turn away from peace negotiations or

initiatives.

Guiding Principles for the Permanent Status Arrangement

Although the Mitchell Report made clear that the ultimate goal is still a permanent status agreement, the nature of that agreement remains uncertain. That said, a permanent status agreement will surely be based on certain guiding principles:

Economics. There will never be a stable peace without a serious, uncorrupted, Palestinian economic infrastructure and a decrease in the economic gap between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel's economy has a GDP per capita of roughly \$20,000, while in Gaza it is \$850 and in the West Bank \$1250. Palestinian economic growth will be necessary to shrink that gap.

Cold Peace. The experience with Egypt has taught Israel a valuable lesson in accepting a cold peace. Israel should be willing to accept something less than an ideal Scandinavian peace—even without friendship at the beginning—if it is a durable peace that means an end to war and violence.

Ability to Defend Itself. In deciding on the lines necessary for its defense, Israel's guiding principle will be national consensus. Israeli presence in Lebanon was beyond the national consensus; it eventually collapsed because the Israeli public could not support it as legitimate a policy of defending Israel beyond its borders. Despite the fact that Israel has paid a much heavier price during the recent intifada than it did during the eighteen years in the Lebanese security zone, people are more willing to make the sacrifice this time. Israelis feel as if they have no peace process partner and no alternative. In this regard, certain geographical lines will remain strategically important, as will the Jordan Valley.

Timetable. No one should be pressed into an artificial timetable. Indeed, the Palestinians should not be pushed to come to the table with their end demands, because they will inevitably bring forth positions to which Israel cannot agree, for instance, on the right of return. Although the Israelis may be ready to see a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, they are certainly opposed to the existence of two Palestinian states -- one in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, and one in Israel. There will be no right of return within 1948 Israel.

Jerusalem. Jerusalem is not to be sold like real estate. A roadmap of what is sacred to whom will be necessary in order to find a way to live peacefully.

Next Steps

The first step is to stabilize the ceasefire agreement. It is not enough for Arafat to use language for outside consumption only, for example, to simply say that he supports a ceasefire; he must ensure that the rank and file gets the message. In order for Palestinians to receive that message from the PA at every level, there must be an immediate stop to incitement—as this is fully under Arafat's control -- as well as arrests of proven terrorists who are even now conducting and planning terrorist activities. In addition, the Palestinians must adopt a policy of no military initiative, as have the Israelis. Finally, a permanent third party presence is needed to help both sides at this delicate moment.

It is more difficult to be hopeful after a disappointment than to be hopeful before the potential disappointment. Any resumption of the peace process will involve the former, and it will be a reluctant, suspicious, and sober hope.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Jacqueline Kaufman.

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

[\(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)

TOPICS

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-
analysis/israel)