

# Israel's Search for Security and Peace (full transcript)

Apr 27, 2001



In-Depth Reports

I want to thank Bob Asher for the kind introduction.

I also want to thank Rob Satloff and The Washington Institute for extending the invitation to me to address this distinguished forum. I'm delighted to be here.

Rob's invitation was accompanied with the request that my speech concentrate on the future. Well, I have no problem with that. I like to think of myself as a forward thinking person who focuses not on the mistakes or misfortunes of the past, but on the hopes and possibilities that belong to the future.

Frankly, for a politician, there is no other way to survive.

But that having been said, I also believe that in order to know where we are going, we need to know from whence we've come.

A Hassidic parable tells of a man -- they seem to always tell about men for some strange reason -- who after a long journey came to a fork in the road. The sign was down, so he knew not which road to choose.

After a few moments of contemplation he pointed the cross-sign in the direction he came from, the other two directionals were then in their proper place, and he knew how to proceed.

The political road that brought us to the crossroads we are now at was one replete with navigational errors, steering miscalculations, and poor vision, traveled by fatigue-driven guides driving under the influence of reckless idealism and senseless naivete.

If we know it, and leave it, we will know the right road to choose for the future.

On February 6 of this year, the people of Israel made it eminently clear that they know it, and have left the road that led from Oslo to chaos and bloodshed in their homes and on their streets.

The best of Israel's political pundits could not have imagined that Ariel Sharon would ever be elected prime minister of Israel, let alone with a plurality unprecedented in democratic nations.

But they did not understand the people of Israel, and probably still don't.

It was the most potent statement imaginable in favor of a new road and a more promising future.

Those who saw from the outset that Oslo would not lead to peace, and I include myself among them, don't deserve the Nobel Prize for political sobriety or realism.

Nor does it mean that we cannot be mistaken in the future about other issues.

What it does mean, is that those who were right once, should be listened to very carefully a second time.

The education portfolio I was privileged to receive when the Sharon government was formed ostensibly has nothing to do with the political process and the choice of faulty political roads.

But only ostensibly. Similar to the post-modernism that has seeped into the educational system in the United States -

- and everything American is imported to Israel sooner or later -- post-Zionism has crept into Israel's educational thinking.

Just as American post-modernism deprecates the American way, challenges Western values, and vitiates historic truth, Israeli post-Zionism denigrates Jewish rights to the Land of Israel, disparages Jewish values, and trivializes the historic justice inherent in Israel's rebirth.

In the "post" world there is only a futuristic guise, for if there is no legitimate past, there can be no future either.

In the "post" world there is no right or wrong on your own side; only your adversary has a claim to justice.

It is a world where it is forbidden to be judgmental where everything is relative.

Where political statements must ipso facto be "evenhanded."

Where one must be careful not to take sides, where justice merits revelation only if it can be spun properly.

How could Israel have continued making unilateral concessions for years, while getting only violence in return?

How could Israel's left and their U.S. supporters have decried the need for reciprocity?

How could they have ignored hate propaganda and wholesale Holocaust denial in school textbooks, in mosque sermons, and in speeches given by Arafat himself?

How could we have gone on blaming ourselves -- like in the battered wife syndrome -- while constantly showing understanding for the unconscionable behavior of the Palestinians?

See post-Zionism and understand why.

So my first commitment to the future as minister of education is to reinstate Jewish values and reinvigorate Zionist idealism in Israel's educational system. It is also the best contribution I can make toward real peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Seem disjointed? Unconnected? Let me explain.

Perched at the nexus of three continents, the reborn state of Israel and its place among the nations is a phenomenon fundamentally linked to the cardinal issues debated by political scientists regarding the future of the world.

Is the post-Cold War world deterministically moving toward liberal democracy, or are there societies which are inherently inimical to democracy?

The end of history, or a clash of civilizations?

Jihad vs. McWorld, as the pundits suggest?

Toward war or peace?

Global village or global pillage?

Both trends seem to exist simultaneously at present.

Empires have crumbled, and the threat of a bipolar world violently facing off to the bitter end over questions of ideology and hegemony appears to have disappeared forever.

But long-quieted resurgent nationalisms have spurred ethnic warfare around the world.

Are these the last palpitations of human conflict or the beginning of a new round of violent confrontation that humankind has repeated since its inception with shocking regularity?

The answer seems inexorably linked to the mode of government in question.

Whether democracies will go to war with other democracies in the future is debatable.

That to date, democracies have not gone to war with each other, is not.

Hence there is great reason for hope. Democracy is on the march the world over.

According to figures released by Freedom House last year, 58 percent of the world's population now lives under democratic rule, compared with 12.4 percent at the turn of the last century.

Based on assessments of multiparty systems, universal suffrage, free-market economics, and respect for civil rights, Freedom House ranked 85 of the world's 192 countries as "free."

In Western Europe, all 24 countries are democratic.

In the Americas, 31 of 35 countries were considered democratic.

In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 19 of the 27 post-Communist countries are fully democratic.

In Africa 20 of the 53 countries.

In the Asia-Pacific region, Freedom House counted 20 of 39.

Even in countries of these regions of the world that were rated "not free," there is the possibility for democratic change because some have liberalized their economies, and the hope is that indeed a liberalized economy will ultimately lead to liberalized government.

There is, however, one region of the world where democracy is conspicuously not on the march. It isn't even on the horizon. The Middle East. Outside of Israel there is not one [democracy].

In the past, that explained in part, the special relationship between the United States and Israel. Today, that fact explains the nature of peace that can be achieved in the foreseeable future, and therefore, the only peace which must be pursued.

It is the peace of deterrence, not *d'Ã©tente*.

If more democracy means less war, less of it means more war.

The question that arises, then, is how to advance democracy.

Does not deterrence cause an entrenchment of hostilities? Will we ever get to a state of affairs that means less war, if we accept a status quo that means more? Ask the idealists.

Realism does need idealism. One of humankind's most important primordial instincts is to effectuate change, to develop, to invent, to improve.

But all that must be done in the context of what is possible. We can dream of the impossible, but we must live in a real world.

For an individual, idealism without realism is dangerous. For a nation it is suicide.

Peace then, between Israel and her neighbors, must be based on deterrence not *d'Ã©tente*. That is realism.

But it is also idealism, because it is the only way of procuring democratic change and ultimately a peace of *d'Ã©tente* as well.

It was not the *d'Ã©tente* of the 1970's that defeated communism, but the deterrence of the 1980's that left the communists with no choice but to embrace democracy.

Former Prime Minister Ehud Barak said in one of his visits to the United States that he won't wait for the Arab states to be "Jeffersonian democracies" to make peace with them.

But that is the whole point. Precisely because they are not democracies, we must not sign treaties with them as if they were.

Autocracies do not honor paper commitments.

Autocracies are not based on accountability, autocrats can launch successive wars, lose, and not get voted out of office. Just look at the case of Iraq, which initiated two wars against Iran and Kuwait within a decade.

Saddam Husayn is still not worrying about his poll numbers.

The peace that we must pursue therefore, must be an interim functional peace, not necessarily final and formal one.

Or put differently, in order to achieve a formal peace we must first shun it, and instead pursue a functional and operational one. When we control the high ground of the Golan, Judea, and Samaria, we have functional peace. When we do not, we have the potential for life-threatening anti-Israel aggression.

When we have a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, we have rights and freedoms guaranteed for all the religions of the world and we have historic justice.

When we have a divided city, we have a prize for aggression and the creation of a new Belfast or Beirut.

I don't know if Islam is antithetical to democratic government. I hope not. That is for theorists to debate.

What I do know is that to date it has proven somewhat impervious to its influences.

I also know that other ideas that moved men, and which also seemed unchallenged by democratic freedoms, were ultimately affected by them.

I believe that the same can happen in the Middle East.

And here I return to Jewish values and Zionist idealism.

Because the temptation to jump ahead too quickly to the *d'Ã©tente* period and bypass the requisite period of deterrence is so great, a democracy needs stamina and ideological conviction to persevere through times that make sunshine patriots get up and run.

If a population is usurped of its *raison d'etre* and sapped of its moral strength, it will not be able to confront the existential challenges to its survival.

"Post-ism" is guilty of doing just that. It creates unstable asymmetries. As William Safire wrote last week, between those whose aim is victory, and those whose aim is just to settle. Under such conditions it is clear which side might prevail.

By calling into question every established norm, by defacing everything sacred, by obfuscating the difference between right and wrong, by shattering the national ethos, by universalizing national particularity, and by moving the periphery to the center, the doctors of moral and historic relativity foster a life-threatening osteoporosis that effects the national body.

Even the most skilled diplomat cannot reach a stable peace when his own nation is infected with such fundamental self-doubt.

Teaching traditional Jewish values means first and foremost those values which provide the basis of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which in turn provide the underpinnings of democratic freedoms.

Just a few weeks ago, Jews in Israel and all over the world sat down to the Passover Seder, something we've been doing now for a good three thousand years.

We recounted, no we relived, the exodus. We first relived slavery, freedom deprivation, so that we could experience

freedom appreciation.

"Let my people go," we were the first to declare, and that is the clarion call that freedom-pursuing people have echoed throughout history.

Teaching Jewish values today means that the responsibility of leading has not come to end. That history is linear, and that the world gets progressively better to the degree that we strive to make it better.

Teaching Jewish values today means educating against "nowism," and immediate gratification. And what is true of personal life is true of national life as well.

"Nowist," premature peace spells war later.

That is no longer mere speculation.

If we teach traditional values we will have the fortitude to bridge the gap between what is and what should be. Between realism and idealism. Between the functional peace of deterrence, and the formal peace of treaties and cooperation.

It is sad, but Machiavelli was right. If there is no clear victor, peace is impossible.

Instead of seeing our territorial compromises over the years as a victor's overtures toward formal peace and regional understanding, our neighbors perceived our magnanimity as expressions of incremental defeat and weakness.

There is no other way of understanding Arafat's rejection of Barak's offer. No to 97 percent? Of course, because defeat is defeat.

Not only must 1967 be redressed in Arafat's mind, but so must the sin of 1948 find atonement in the realization of the right of return.

The moment it became clear that that was not going to happen -- terror.

Exploding civilian buses.

Mortars fired into school yards.

Teachers and students gunned down on their way to school.

A ten-month-old baby shot in the head.

Parents shot dead in front of their children.

Lynchings.

For future peace, this new totalitarianism must be defeated. And to defeat it, Israel must retrieve its own inner moral confidence.

This is not Islam. It is not Islam, which must be defeated. It is a radical terroristic deviation from Islam that must be routed.

I am confident that it will be. Just as evil empires of yesterday fell at the feet of freedom-loving ideas that motivate humans to remain calm in the face of trouble, secure in the righteousness of their cause, so too this new evil will find defeat.

It is a threat to the advances that freedom has made over the past decade in countries all over the world, but nowhere, and to no one is it as great a threat as to Israel.

If Israel wins the battle against this terroristic tyranny, the world will win too.

Practically speaking, this means no more unilateral concessions on Israel's part. Ninety-eight percent of the

Palestinian Arabs living the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, are no longer under Israel's control. And that is the way it should stay.

In addition over 40 percent of the territory has been turned over to the Palestinian Authority.

Giving Arafat a sovereign, territorially contiguous state, with internationally recognized borders over the rest of the West Bank and Gaza as well, is out of the question. There is no rational explanation conceivable for doing something that would destabilize not only Israel, but certainly Jordan and probably the entire region as well.

Until now, the argument has been that without the creation of such a state regional and world stability would be threatened.

The centrality of Palestinian problem.

That was the argument that the Palestinians used to convince the world that all Middle East problems depend on their's being solved. Well, over the last eight years, diplomacy was focused almost entirely on the Palestinian problem, and the Middle East became far more unstable, as Iraq slipped out of UN monitoring, Iran became more assertive, and the Russians backed both [Iraq and Iran] against the United States.

The new Bush administration is to be lauded over the fact that it has rejected this canard of Palestinian centrism. It is a rejection long overdue.

T. S. Eliot wrote 'in "The Hollow Men":

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Falls the shadow

We have the idea. But the reality is that it is an idea that our neighbors do not yet share. That leaves us not with peace, but in the shadow of peace.

In the short run, things will continue to look bleak. It will not be easy for the fainthearted. It would be much easier for us all to talk in glowing terms about peace being around the corner. A few more concessions here. A few more White House ceremonies there.

Real formal peace will come one day. More and more people are embracing freedom around the world and it is bound to reach the Middle East as well. And where there is liberty, human dignity, and governmental freedom, peace naturally follows.

Let us hope that our good but naive intentions to rush prematurely to history's end, will not keep us in the shadows longer than necessary. ❖

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