

# Israel's Search for Security and Peace

Apr 27, 2001



## In-Depth Reports

I want to thank the Washington Institute for inviting me to address this distinguished forum today. This invitation was accompanied by a request that my speech concentrate on the future. I have no problem with that request, of course. 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. Having said that, I also believe that in order to know where we are going, we need to know whence we have come. A Hassidic parable tells of a man -- they always seem to tell about men for some strange reason -- who after a long journey came to a fork in the road. The sign was down and he knew not which road to choose. After a few moments of contemplation, he picked up the sign and pointed the cross-shaped marker in the direction from which he had come. 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 where we now find ourselves was one replete with navigational errors and poor vision, traveled by fatigued guides driving under the influence of reckless idealism and naiveté. If we see this road for what it is, though, 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 recognize -- and have left -- the road that led from Oslo to chaos and bloodshed in their homes and on their streets. The best of 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. Yet, such pundits did not understand the people of Israel, and probably still do not. 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 -- hardly deserve a Nobel Prize for their political sobriety or realism, nor does their foresight mean that they will not 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 the second time around.

Ostensibly, the education portfolio that I was privileged to receive when the Sharon government was formed had nothing to do with the political process and the new choice of political roads -- but only ostensibly. Similar to the post-modernism that has seeped into the educational system in the United States, a post-Zionism has now crept into Israel's educational system and thinking -- after all, everything American becomes important to Israel sooner or later. Just as American post-modernism deprecates the American way, challenges Western values, and vitiates historic truths, 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 such a "post" world, the future is only a guise, for when there is no legitimate past, there can be no true future. In the post world, there is no right or wrong on your own side; only your adversary has a claim to justice. This is a world where it is forbidden to be judgmental, where everything is relative, where political statements must ipso facto be even-handed, 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 leftists and their U.S. supporters have decried the need for reciprocity? How could they have ignored hate propaganda and wholesale Holocaust denial in Palestinian school textbooks, in mosque sermons, and in speeches given by Yasir Arafat himself? How could we have gone on blaming ourselves, like battered wives, while

constantly showing understanding for the unconscionable behavior of the Palestinians? One need only look at post-Zionism to understand how. Thus, my first commitment to the future as minister of education is to reinstate Jewish values and reinvigorate Zionist idealism in Israel's educational system. This is also the best contribution that I can make toward real peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Perched at the nexus of three continents, the reborn state of Israel is fundamentally linked to the cardinal issues debated by political scientists regarding the future of the world. Is the post-Cold War world moving deterministically toward liberal democracy, or are there societies that are inherently inimical to democracy? Will we see the end of history or a clash of civilizations? Will it be Jihad or McWorld, as the pundits suggest? War or peace? Global village or global pillage? Both trends seem to coexist at present. Empires have crumbled, and the threat of a bipolar world fighting to the bitter end over questions of ideology and hegemony seems to have disappeared forever. Yet, resurgent nationalism has spurred ethnic warfare around the world in recent years. 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 our modes of government. 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 multi-party 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 are considered democratic. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 19 of 27 post-Communist countries are fully democratic. In Africa, Freedom House counted 20 out of 53 countries as free, and in the Asia-Pacific region, 20 of 39. As for the countries in these regions that were rated as "not free," there is still the possibility for democratic change because some have liberalized their economies, which may well lead to liberalized government.

In one region of the world, however, democracy is clearly not on the march, nor even on the horizon: the Middle East. Outside of Israel, there is not one democratic nation. In the past, this fact explained in part the special relationship between the United States and Israel. Today, it explains the nature of the only peace that can be achieved in the foreseeable future, and therefore the only peace that should be pursued: the peace of deterrence, not *d'Ã©tente*. If more democracy means less war, then 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 reach a state of affairs that means less war if we accept a status quo that means more? One of humankind's most important primordial instincts is to effectuate change, to develop, to invent, and to improve, but all of that must be done in the context of what is possible.

Realism does need idealism. Yet, while we can dream of the impossible, we must live in the real world. For an individual, idealism without realism is dangerous. For a nation, it is suicide. Peace between Israel and her neighbors must therefore be based on deterrence, not *d'Ã©tente*. This is realism. Yet, it is also idealism because it is the only way of procuring democratic change and, ultimately, *d'Ã©tente*. It was not the *d'Ã©tente* of the 1970s that defeated communism, but the deterrence of the 1980s that left communist nations with no choice but to embrace democracy.

In one of his visits to the United States, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak said that he would not wait for the Arab states to become Jeffersonian democracies before making peace with them. Yet, the opposite is true: 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; Saddam Husayn initiated costly wars against Iran and Kuwait

within a decade, but he is still not worrying about his poll numbers. Therefore, we must pursue an interim, functional peace, not necessarily a final, formal one. Or, put differently, in order to achieve a formal peace, we must first shun it and instead establish an 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 aggression against Israel. When we have a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, we have historic justice and guaranteed freedoms for all the religions of the world. When we have a divided city, we have a prize to be won through aggression -- a new Belfast or Beirut.

I do not know whether Islam is antithetical to democratic government, and I hope it is not. That is for theorists to debate. What I do know is that, to date, it has proven somewhat impervious to the influences of democracy. I also know that other ideas which have moved man and which also seemed incompatible with democratic freedoms were ultimately affected by such freedoms. I believe that the same can happen in the Middle East. Thus, I return to Jewish values and Zionist idealism, because the temptation is so great to jump ahead too quickly to the d'Ã©tente period and bypass the requisite period of deterrence. A democracy needs stamina and ideological conviction in order to persevere through times that make sunshine patriots flee. If a population is usurped of its *raison d'Ãªtre* and sapped of its moral strength, it will not be able to confront existential challenges to its survival. Post-Zionism is guilty of doing just that; as William Safire wrote, it creates unstable asymmetries 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 confusing 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 lifethreatening osteoporosis in the national body. Even the most skilled diplomat cannot reach a stable peace when his own nation is infected with such fundamental self-doubt.

Traditional Jewish values are, first and foremost, those values that form the basis of the Judeo-Christian ethic which, in return, provides the underpinnings of democratic freedom. When Jews in Israel and all over the world sit down to the Passover seder, something we have been doing now for nearly 3,000 years, we recount -- no, we relive -- the Exodus. We relive slavery so that we can appreciate freedom. "Let my people go," we were the first to declare, a clarion call that freedom-pursuing people have echoed throughout history. Teaching Jewish values today means that our responsibility for leading has not come to an 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 immediate gratification, in personal life and national life alike. Premature peace now spells war later; this 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 eventual peace of treaties and cooperation.

Unfortunately, Machiavelli was right: if there is no clear victor, peace is impossible. Instead of seeing our territorial compromises over the years as gestures toward formal peace and regional understanding, our neighbors perceived our magnanimity as an expression of incremental defeat and weakness. There is no other way to understand Arafat's rejection of Barak's "97 percent" offer -- after all, our incremental defeat is still defeat. From this perspective, not only must the Six Day War be redressed in Arafat's mind, but so must the "sin" of 1948 find atonement in the realization of the Palestinian right of return. The moment it became clear that this was not going to happen, terror reerupted: lynchings, exploding civilian buses, mortars fired into schoolyards, 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.

For the sake of future peace, this new totalitarianism must be defeated. In order to defeat it, Israel must retrieve its moral confidence. It is not Islam which must be defeated, but rather a radical, terroristic deviation from Islam. I am confident that it will be routed, just as the evil empires of yesterday fell at the feet of freedom-loving people who

remained calm in the face of trouble, secure in the righteousness of their cause. Such terror is a threat to the advances that freedom has made over the past decade in countries all over the world, but nowhere is it a greater threat than in Israel. If Israel wins the battle against this terroristic tyranny, the world will win, too.

Practically speaking, this strategy necessitates that no more unilateral concessions be made on Israel's part. Ninety-eight percent of the Palestinian Arabs living in the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza are no longer under Israel's control, and that is the way it should be. In addition, over 40 percent of the territory has been turned over to the Palestinian Authority. Nevertheless, giving Arafat a sovereign, territorially contiguous state with internationally recognized borders enclosing the rest of the West Bank and Gaza is out of question. There is no rational explanation for doing something that would destabilize not only Israel and Jordan, but probably the entire region. Until now, Palestinians have argued that without the creation of such a state, regional and world stability would be threatened. This was the argument used to convince the world that all Middle Eastern problems depended on the resolution of the Palestinian problem. Over the last eight years, diplomacy has been focused almost entirely on this problem, yet the Middle East became far more unstable, as Iraq eluded United Nations monitoring, Iran became more assertive, and the Russians backed both countries against the United States. The new Bush administration is to be lauded for its rejection of this canard of Palestinian centrism; it is a rejection long overdue.

In his poem "The Hollow Men," T.S. Eliot wrote: "Between the idea / And the reality / . . . Falls the Shadow." We have the idea, but the reality is that our neighbors do not yet share this idea. Thus, we are left not with peace, but in the shadow of peace. In the short run, the situation will continue to look bleak, and it will not be easy for the fainthearted. Yet, it is too easy 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 people are embracing freedom around the world, and it is bound to reach the Middle East as well. Where there is liberty, human dignity, and governmental freedom, peace naturally follows. So let us hope that our good but naive intentions -- our premature rush to history's end -- will not keep us in the shadows longer than necessary. ❖

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