

# Middle East Peace through Partition

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## Articles & Testimony

Just last summer, the seven-year-old Israeli-Palestinian peace process seemed on the verge of success. Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Yasir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met with President Bill Clinton at Camp David and came close to agreement. But Arafat walked away from a deal at the last moment, and less than three months later the Occupied Territories erupted in violence. Now, after months of bloodshed and with the death toll approaching 400, it has become fashionable to say that the Oslo process (so called for the city where talks first began) is dead. Rumors of its demise, however, have been exaggerated. Its central objective — transforming the existential Israeli-Palestinian conflict by ending Israel's mutually harmful control over three million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza — remains as crucial today as it was seven years ago.

It was in Oslo in 1993 that the Israeli government, under then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, first agreed to withdraw from parts of the West Bank and Gaza and opted definitively for territorial partition. With this shift in Israeli policy, Rabin crushed the Israeli right's dream of a Greater Israel. And he signaled his support for a solution to the conflict that envisioned a new state of Palestine arising alongside an Israel finally accepted by the Arabs.

The peacemakers at Oslo foresaw both separation and cooperation for the two states. Partition would occur in stages and be facilitated by confidence-building measures and a gradual easing of Israeli-Palestinian enmity. The two sides would cooperate in such areas as security and trade and defer resolving the most divisive issues, including Jerusalem and refugees. Arafat took the helm in Gaza and the PA was established in 1994, but underlying grievances endured and the spirit of cooperation soon soured, leaving part of the Oslo vision unfulfilled.

Now the ongoing misery in the region has made it clear that partition remains the only feasible option for resolving the conflict. And as Israel's only hope for peace, partition should be pursued whether or not the Palestinians agree to it. After the disastrous past several months, something more modest than Oslo is now in order. The move to a comprehensive deal should begin with a less ambitious but still enormous step: disengagement, which would put as much space as possible between the two sides.

A key premise of the Oslo talks was that formal peace agreements would produce greater trust and security for both sides. But although several interim accords have been negotiated, such trust has shown few signs of developing. Disengagement now could jump-start the process and ultimately evolve into full state-to-state cooperation. Even if it does not, however, it is a practical approach that could achieve stability — the next best thing. Focusing on

disengagement may mean that Oslo's promise of full cooperation remains unfulfilled for the moment, but the alternatives — occupation, ethnic cleansing (or "transfer," as it is called in Israel), and Shimon Peres' vision of a harmonious "New Middle East" — are either unworkable or unthinkable.

In his final days in office, Clinton put forward the most detailed peace plan of any American president to date. But the Clinton plan was unrealistic, since it assumed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was on the brink of resolution. Now President George W. Bush must push for something less grandiose than a comprehensive deal while trying to halt the slide toward a Kosovo on the Jordan or even a full-scale regional war.

Pursuing a middle course toward disengagement and then waiting for matters to stabilize should not, however, obscure the fact that Israeli-Palestinian cooperation remains a vital long-term goal. Just as current passions necessitate disengagement in the short term, the stubborn constraints of Middle Eastern geography necessitate cooperation in the long run. Israel has no military solution to Palestinian nationalism, and the Palestinians can never eliminate Israel through force. The two sides must learn to live together. After all, Israel at its center is no wider than Manhattan is long, and the adjoining West Bank is the size of Delaware. Israelis and Palestinians do not have the luxury of the kind of cold peace that Israel and Egypt — separated by hundreds of miles of desert — now share. Oslo's underlying two-state vision therefore remains sound, even as Israelis and Palestinians sift through the wreckage. Sooner or later, they will have to come back to partition.

What Went Wrong? Outsiders often assume that the main source of conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is how to deal with the West Bank and Gaza. In fact, the conflict runs far deeper. Palestinians and Israelis have radically different historical narratives. These predate the occupation that began in 1967; they go to each side's self-conception as a historical victim, and they have engendered much mutual hatred.

Notwithstanding these deep grievances, however, Oslo suffered from more immediate problems: what the Palestinians failed to do, what the Israelis failed to do, both sides' unfulfilled hopes for the new PA, and the lack of strategy for final-status talks.

Perhaps Oslo's greatest problem was the inadequacy of the Palestinian leadership. Only Arafat — who embodied his people's nationalist aspirations since becoming leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the late 1960s — had sufficient stature to sign an accord with the Israelis in 1993. But Arafat subsequently made three unprincipled decisions that crippled the peace process. First, he failed to repudiate violence as a negotiating tactic; in fact, he relished using it to achieve political goals. Second, Arafat subjected security cooperation with Israel to the vicissitudes of the political environment, thereby undermining Israel's faith in the stability of the "land for peace" equation. And third, unlike Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Arafat refused to equate peace with reconciliation, thus gutting any hopes that a deal between governments could be transformed into a far more meaningful — and lasting — peace between peoples.

The Oslo framework was based on Arafat's promise to Rabin that henceforth all disputes would be solved peacefully. To this end, Israel helped create an armed PA, giving it the security apparatus the Palestinian leaders deemed essential to wage war against the Islamist extremists of Hamas.

This Palestinian security force ultimately exceeded its agreed-on size limit by half and comprised no fewer than 12 different security services. Nonetheless, during the first three years of the PA's existence, Arafat resisted unceasing U.S. and Israeli entreaties to use his new muscle to clamp down on Hamas. According to the human rights group B'tzelem, 172 Israelis were killed during this period. All the while, Arafat gave speeches hailing the principle of jihad, and after the Hamas bomb-maker Yahya Ayyash was killed by the Israelis, Arafat publicly eulogized him as a martyr.

In 1996, when violence again erupted — this time after Likud Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu opened an underground tunnel near the plateau in Jerusalem's Old City that Jews venerate as the Temple Mount and Muslims

as the Noble Sanctuary — Arafat remained silent for days before intervening to stop the riots, which killed 65 Palestinians and 15 Israelis. The rioting proved an effective bargaining tool for Arafat, breaking a logjam in negotiations then underway over Hebron. When riots broke out again on May 15 last year to mourn the anniversary of the birth of Israel and to demand the release of more Palestinian prisoners, precedent prevailed: Israel opted for diplomatic concessions once more, agreeing to yield villages around Jerusalem to PA control.

The most glaring example of Arafat's use of violence as a negotiating tactic came after last summer's Camp David summit. Arafat was unhappy with the American and Israeli positions — which included an offer of 94 percent of the West Bank and all of Gaza — but made no proposals of his own. Whether or not he was actually responsible for the subsequent outbreak of violence remains subject to debate. But there can be little doubt that he fueled the fighting instead of trying to stop it. State-run Palestinian media exhorted crowds to participate, and daily coordinating meetings took place between Arafat's Fatah movement and members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. On two separate occasions in October, the PA released known terrorists from prison, which seemed to be a green light from the PA for the subsequent terror attacks. Despite making promises to Clinton and other top U.S. officials, Arafat took nearly two full months to issue his first call for the Palestinians to reduce (but not halt) the bloodshed.

In a similar vein, the PA has often refused to coordinate security measures with Israel over the years. Security cooperation — which was to be Israel's principal benefit from Oslo — was held hostage to politics. As Israel's Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh put it in the fall of 2000, "the Palestinians have not delivered on Oslo's basic bargain: [a] state for security." This utter refusal of PA security forces to maintain direct contacts with the Israelis — or even to answer their cell phones during times of tension — eventually compelled the Clinton administration to use the CIA to help fill the void by acting as a liaison between the two sides.

Beyond the use of violence as a negotiating tool and the on-again, off-again nature of security cooperation, Arafat's third failure of leadership was his refusal to publicly chart a course for reconciliation. After all, "land for peace" had been the original premise of all Arab-Israeli negotiations. Oslo was structured around step-by-step withdrawals and based on the implicit belief that further Israeli land concessions would take the edge off Arab enmity, which in turn would ease Israeli opposition to a Palestinian state. But as land was handed over, Palestinian calls for reconciliation never came. No programs were ever implemented to this end; in seven years, Arafat never gave a single speech in Arabic to his own people calling for reconciliation. This failure was critical, for arguments over the permanence and legitimacy of a Jewish homeland in the Middle East remain at the very heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Arafat's failure to bury the hatchet has been duly noted by his constituents — as a comprehensive poll taken by the Ramallah-based Bir Zeit University last November showed. When asked whether they would recognize Israeli sovereignty over West Jerusalem if Palestinians gained sovereignty over East Jerusalem, an overwhelming 74 percent of Palestinians said no. Furthermore, 60 percent said they did not think there was a chance for peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israel. Another Palestinian poll released in December found that a full two-thirds of Palestinians supported "suicide operations" against Israel. These numbers are not surprising. After all, Arafat himself has likened peace with Israel to the Treaty of Hudabiyya, the temporary truce that the Prophet Muhammad made with the non-Muslim Quraysh in 628 A.D. — only to conquer those same people years later. Such rhetoric has made peace with Israel sound like a short-term ruse. And such sentiments were further exacerbated when Arafat publicly expressed doubts about Jewish attachment to the land of Israel. Arafat further alleged that Israel was "forging its history and reality" by claiming the existence of two ancient Jewish temples in Jerusalem.

All the while, Palestinian state-run media and state-backed Islamist preachers in mosques have launched unrelenting, venomous attacks against Israel and Jews. Palestinian schoolchildren are often taught to hate from a young age. And they are prevented from learning anything about Israel; the Jewish state's existence and location are conspicuously absent from many of their textbooks.

By articulating support for coexistence, Arafat could have moderated Palestinian hatred and broadened the Israeli public's support for withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat's statesmanlike visit to Jerusalem in 1977 had just such an effect. Arafat's failure to take such steps left Israeli moderates politically vulnerable — especially Rabin, Barak, and Peres.

Facts on the Ground Israel's record is not flawless. It did keep its end of the core bargain with the Palestinians by letting Arafat return to Palestine, by enabling the establishment of a Palestinian proto-government, and by giving it land to govern. Although the Israelis may not have violated the letter of their agreements, however, they certainly broke their spirit in one particularly sensitive area: settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. During the original Oslo talks in 1993, the Palestinians had wanted an explicit Israeli commitment to a settlement freeze. But Rabin, leery of a confrontation with the settlers, refused. And Israel, under both Labor and Likud governments, supported ongoing Jewish settlement expansion.

According to Israel's dovish Peace Now, settlements today take up only 1.36 percent of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem and access roads), but the issue remains emotionally charged. Residential housing units under construction in the territories have expanded by 54 percent since 1993, and the number of Jewish settlers has grown from 115,000 to about 177,000. Bypass roads built to limit friction between settlers and Palestinians have only made things worse: Palestinians see the roads as land expropriations designed to make life easier for the settlers at Palestinian expense. As for the settlements themselves, most of the growth has taken place in three blocks near the pre-1967 borders of Israel, in areas that Israel intends to annex (the annexation was reportedly accepted by Arafat at Camp David). But the new homes — with their modern red-tiled roofs and community swimming pools — have created resentment among the Palestinians, who see them as an Israeli attempt to prejudice talks on final borders.

Letdowns On top of Palestinian incitement and Israeli settlement expansion, each side feels the other has failed to observe its commitments under Oslo, thereby undermining faith in the integrity of the process.

Palestinians complain that Israel has repeatedly broken its deadlines for withdrawing from the West Bank. Although Israel has in fact yielded 40 percent of the West Bank to full or partial PA control, and although virtually all Palestinians now live in such areas, the Israeli occupation has been only partially dismantled. Signs of Israel's ongoing control abound, and these — especially the Israeli checkpoints on main roads between Palestinian cities — are offensive to Palestinians.

Israel, meanwhile, complains that the PA releases Hamas terrorists from its custody in a revolving-door fashion, that weapons are regularly smuggled into the territories, and that the agreed-on quotas of the number of Palestinian security forces have been blithely ignored. When the Netanyahu government shone a spotlight on the fact that Palestinian textbooks and state-run media continue to challenge Israel's very existence — in violation of Oslo provisions against incitement — the prime minister was derided for seeking a pretext to halt the peace process. But the Israeli left could never explain why, if the PA was genuinely committed to partition and coexistence, it refused to stem the tide of bilge.

In addition to these grievances, the PA itself represents an enormous economic and political failure. In the six years following Oslo, the Palestinians saw their per capita GNP remain flat at \$1,600. The Palestinians blame this on Israel's tight control of their borders and its closures of the territories during much of this period. Until a wave of Palestinian knifings of Israelis in early 1993, an estimated 140,000 Palestinians worked as day laborers in Israel, either legally or illegally, and they made vital contributions to the underdeveloped Palestinian economy. But the number of day laborers plummeted in the aftermath of terror attacks, and they were eventually replaced, mainly by Romanian and Thai guest workers. The majority of Palestinians, including Arafat, decried the closures as collective punishment, souring the climate still further.

Despite Palestinians' complaints, however, many of their economic woes are self-inflicted. Arafat has done little to wean his people from their economic dependence on Israel. The PA's only notable economic success was the creation of a casino in Jericho, which attracted Israelis forbidden to gamble inside Israel's borders. As a revolutionary, Arafat has considered it beneath his dignity to focus his energy and resources on economic development; last summer he angrily waved away CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour when she asked him about such issues.

As bad as they are, the Palestinians' economic woes are only part of a broader problem: namely, scant government accountability. The PA is thoroughly corrupt. And although it has a popularly elected legislature, its executive branch remains authoritarian. Israel, which believes that a strong-armed government is more ruthless and hence more effective at fighting terror, has not pressed for reform. Thus the Palestinian rulers, insulated from the public, have managed to shirk responsibility for their misrule and blame their problems on external foes.

**A Slow Road to Nowhere** The gradualism that was Oslo's signature style held both promise and peril. Unfortunately, instead of slowly building support, the incremental Oslo process let leaders on both sides defer tough decisions on core issues. This delay wound up eroding confidence rather than enhancing it. The process also allowed each side to make contrary claims at home. With no road map for a final deal, Israeli leaders were able to continually promise their constituents what they wanted — including a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty — while Arafat could promise his people what they wanted — including the right of return for all Palestinians to long-abandoned homes inside Israel. Arafat sold Oslo to his public by telling them it guaranteed a return to the 1967 lines and entailed no compromises. He led his people to believe that they would get 100 percent of the land they wanted. This unsurprisingly led to unrealistic expectations and the explosion of frustration (egged on by the PA) that followed the failure of Camp David.

When it finally came time to discuss the ultimate issues, still another set of problems arose. Barak came to office in the summer of 1999 promising to solve the entire Arab-Israeli conflict within a year. This pledge was based on his willingness to make far-reaching concessions, on his excellent relationship with Clinton, and on his desire to counteract the threat posed by the rising power of Iran and Iraq. Barak figured that his best chance to get the Palestinians to compromise while neutralizing the last military threat on Israel's borders was to cut a separate deal with Syria. But when the Syrian track collapsed in the spring of 2000, it proved to have been a major detour, consuming the first eight months of the Barak administration — the time when the premier's popularity was at its height.

By spending so much time on the Syrians, Barak more than halved the period in which he could strike a deal with the Palestinians and still reach the September 13, 2000, target date for the end of negotiations. Then, to make matters worse, after details from secret talks in Stockholm leaked last summer, the Palestinians refused to discuss issues seriously. Meanwhile, the United States failed to persuade either Egypt or Saudi Arabia to acquiesce to a deal or provide sorely needed political cover for Arafat that would let him make compromises on Jerusalem. With the deadline looming, the Palestinians publicly complained that Israel was dragging its feet. But it was Barak who felt the keenest sense of urgency. Once the extent of his planned concessions leaked, his coalition effectively disintegrated, shrinking to 42 seats in the 120-member Knesset.

At the Camp David talks, both sides considered taboo-breaking concessions on once intractable issues. But the talks ultimately foundered on the questions of Jerusalem — specifically, Arafat's unwillingness to share sovereignty over the Temple Mount — and the Palestinian refugees.

Arafat never told the truth to the Palestinian exiles who fled or were chased from Israel in 1948: that not even Israel's leading doves could accept their return to the country. To allow three million Palestinians to return to a nation of five million Jews and one million Israeli Arabs would be the death knell of the Jewish state. Arafat should have told the

refugees to focus on finding new homes elsewhere or next door, in the new state of Palestine. But he lacked the courage to do so. This made compromise all the more difficult.

The Enduring Promise of Peace Despite its apparent failure, the Oslo process achieved many important gains for both sides, which should be kept in mind when discussing any future peace plan. The Palestinians won a peculiar country-like status, with institutions (including various ministries, a parliament, and security services) that would constitute the nucleus of their future state. And Arafat began to be treated everywhere as a de facto head of state. Before Oslo, he was not permitted to visit the United States; afterwards, he became the leader most often invited to the Oval Office. Clinton himself addressed the Palestine National Council in Gaza, which Palestinians saw as an endorsement of their hopes for statehood.

For Israel, the gains came in different arenas. When security cooperation with the Palestinians actually worked, it had positive results. For example, in 1999 Israel suffered the fewest civilian fatalities due to terrorism (two) in any one year since 1987. Oslo also enabled Israel to transform its covert security links with Jordan into a full peace treaty and to strengthen its ties with strategically positioned Turkey. In addition, Israel gained lesser forms of diplomatic relations with 8 of 22 members of the Arab League. It participated in four U.S.-backed regional economic conferences, and Western investors poured billions of dollars into the country. Most important, the 1990s was the first decade since Israel's creation in 1948 that passed without an Arab-Israeli war.

Over Here The American role in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations has varied over the last decade, depending on who held power in Israel. When the right-leaning Likud ruled, Washington took an active stance, fearing that a less conciliatory Israeli government might provoke a regional conflagration and jeopardize U.S. interests. Such activism led to the U.S.-brokered Madrid conference in 1991 and Wye River agreement in 1998.

When a center-left Labor government has led Israel, however, the United States has generally acted as a facilitator, helping out when needed but letting Israel set the pace. It is no coincidence that the original Oslo agreement itself was struck without U.S. involvement.

Washington dropped this back-seat approach last summer, however, when despite the constant dialogue, Israelis and Palestinians seemed unable to agree on final status issues. Led by Clinton, American diplomats at Camp David shuttled between the two sides; Barak and Arafat did not once meet alone during the 12-day summit.

It has become popular to blame Clinton for his intensive role at Camp David, but such critiques are unfair. Oslo and subsequent agreements had set target dates for resolving final-status issues, and these were about to expire. Moreover, Barak's ruling coalition was disintegrating. He himself asked Clinton to convene the summit, telling him the time was "now or never."

Clinton has also been taken to task for the last-ditch suggestions he made on December 23rd of last year. The lame-duck president presented the Israelis and the Palestinians with the most explicit and far-reaching proposals suggested by any American government to date. Under his plan, the Palestinians would get control of almost all of East Jerusalem, including much of the Old City; exclusive sovereignty over the Temple Mount; and a formula that would enable some Palestinian refugees — as determined by the Israeli government — to move into pre-1967 Israel. Barak provisionally supported the proposals, while Arafat's aides gave them "qualified acceptance" — with so many objections that the Palestinian acceptance was all but meaningless.

This time, the criticism of Clinton was merited. Although the U.S. president's proposals approximated the ultimate compromises necessary for a final deal, they were divorced from current reality. In the months since Camp David, the situation had changed drastically. Although sharp Israeli concessions might have been appropriate last summer, they were much less so after all the bloodshed. The latest uprising shattered hopes that the conflict would soon be resolved. And without an end to the fight in sight, the Israeli public now fears that far-reaching sacrifices on

Jerusalem (of the kind Clinton proposed) will make them physically vulnerable. They are thus much less interested in compromise. Instead of pushing for a deal, then, the Americans should have focused on ending violence and restoring trust. In failing to do so, Clinton left a dangerous legacy for the new Bush administration; his ideas could become lasting U.S. policy whether or not an end to the conflict is within grasp.

Breaking up is Hard to Do To undo the damage, Bush should now acknowledge that a comprehensive deal is not at hand, and he should work with Israel's new prime minister to enhance stability in the region while assuming that conflict may continue. Bush can do this by promoting disengagement. This would not close the door on a broader ultimate deal, however, for disengagement is an interim idea. But the length of this interim should not be set by an artificial deadline. Before moving toward closer ties, Israel should look for tangible signals that the Palestinians are truly ready to end the conflict and start cooperating. The criteria of cooperation are not amorphous. They include resolving disputes peacefully, guaranteeing permanent security cooperation, and working toward reconciliation. This last point means putting an end to the use of state-run media and school curricula to delegitimize Israel, and promoting instead a normalization of ties between the two societies. Until such criteria are met, diplomacy should be predicated not on the Oslo assumption of land for peace, but on something less romantic: a strategic Israeli withdrawal from most of the territories in return for a protracted truce or the kind of nonbelligerency that Israel and Egypt agreed to in 1975 (the "Sinai II" disengagement agreement), which paved the way to their 1979 peace treaty.

Such a middle path has advantages for both sides. Modern Israel cannot retain control over all its biblical territory while remaining a Jewish state and a democracy. And only after the Palestinians relinquish claims to the 1948 borders can they start addressing their own endemic problems.

If done properly, disengagement will provide Israel with more rational and defensible borders and give the Palestinians the potential for a viable state. Israel should consolidate its settlements in the West Bank into three blocks (where close to 80 percent of the settlers already live) while dismantling all of the other smaller and less defensible settlements elsewhere in the territories (including all the settlements in Gaza). Israel could then annex the consolidated West Bank settlement blocks as envisioned at Camp David. This would serve Palestinian interests as well. The Palestinians would still get the overwhelming majority of the West Bank and Gaza. And consolidation would make their territory contiguous, not split apart by scattered Israeli settlements and access roads. Meanwhile, keeping the populations apart and erecting borders between them would reduce the grinding friction that has poisoned relations over the last 33 years.

European Union-style open borders between the two states may be possible at some point in the future, but only after a drastic improvement in relations. Israelis today are justly afraid of terrorism, and the Palestinians justly want the Israelis out of their lives. Polls demonstrate that disengagement is popular in both communities. And if the violence worsens, disengagement will become even more attractive.

Of course, cooperation is ultimately necessary, for only by cooperating can the two sides resolve the vital issues of refugees and control of Jerusalem. Deciding the status of the Jordan Valley — the eastern frontier where Iraq attacked Israel in 1948 and menaced it in 1967 — may also have to be deferred until Israel finally makes peace with Iraq. But such cooperation can come only after disengagement, not before it. As Rabin once put it, Israelis and Palestinians should "separate out of respect."

Meanwhile, disengagement would allow the Palestinians to declare statehood, a cherished goal. Israel would be able to withdraw its troops. And disengagement would provide a psychological boost to both sides, who have been badly traumatized in the last generation. Palestinians have suffered the humiliating Israeli occupation, while Israelis have lived with the daily threat of terrorism. Each side now needs some breathing space to recuperate, and a border behind which to do so.

This does not mean that a Great Wall of China should be built in the Middle East, however. A wall with windows is required. The geography of the region is so intimate that the two states will have to share resources such as electricity grids and water for the foreseeable future. The PA depends on Israel for a third of its GNP, and if regulated properly, economic interaction could continue. Furthermore, the two sides need to cooperate on security, as Israel does with Jordan.

Disengagement would preferably be achieved by agreement and not simply a unilateral Israeli fiat. Such an agreement might anger those Israelis who now believe that nothing can be gained from further negotiations with the truculent Palestinians. Unilateral action would also be tempting because it would enable Israel to draw its own territorial lines, regardless of the impact on the Palestinians. Such temptation should be resisted, however, unless the Palestinians refuse to cooperate and Israel is left with no alternative.

There are several reasons why a deal on disengagement — even a tacit arrangement — would be better than a series of uncoordinated, unilateral land-grabs. Due to the small size of the region and the need for a shared infrastructure, security cooperation, and economic links, any uncoordinated step is guaranteed to cause conflict. Second, coming on the heels of last spring's unilateral Israeli pullout from Lebanon, an unnegotiated withdrawal from the territories would further erode the perception of Israel's strength in the neighborhood. Indeed, Hamas has already trumpeted what it calls the "Hizbullah model" for gaining territory: do not negotiate with Israel — expel it. Many Arabs would therefore likely interpret the immediate, unilateral dismantling of several isolated settlements as a sign of Israeli weakness. On the other hand, a deal on withdrawal would give Israel the political cover needed to dismantle settlements without undermining its deterrent.

An agreement, then, is clearly preferable to unilateral Israeli action. If the Palestinians prove unwilling to comply, however, Israel should wait until the current violence dies down — or simply wait for a decent interval — and then act alone to disengage.

**Bush's Burden** The scaled-down approach to Middle East peace presented here should not seem alien to the Bush administration. After all, Republican realists traditionally argue that security emerges not from a contractual peace but from realistic, mutually acceptable arrangements designed to enhance stability.

To lay the groundwork for disengagement, the United States should help the Israelis and Palestinians contain the chaos and halt the violence. The Bush administration must discourage what PA cabinet minister Nabil Sha'ath has called the "Algerian model" — to negotiate amid violence. There should be no diplomatic reward for bloodshed. Secretary of State Colin Powell and other top aides should also recognize how the toxic public environment is poisoning negotiations and get serious about combating incitement. And they should be less tolerant of violations of the agreements by either side; peace will not work if treaties are not implemented fully and fairly.

At the same time, the United States should do what it can to make the PA more viable, encouraging Palestinian economic development in order to dilute the PA's dependence on Israel. Washington should urge the Persian Gulf states to use a fraction of their recent oil profits to employ Palestinians as guest workers. And the United States should start promoting Palestinian democracy in a bid for more accountable, less corrupt government.

Finally, Washington must remind the parties — both Arafat and Israel's newly elected prime minister — that merely creating a border will not absolve them of their responsibilities. Palestinians and Israelis must learn to speak the language of reconciliation, or else cooperation will remain elusive. Even once a real border and state-to-state relations are established, consistent joint counterterrorism efforts will remain essential.

Above all, the Bush team must understand that it cannot walk away from this volcanic situation. The stakes for Washington are high, and benign neglect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will occur at America's peril. More than at any other time in the last three decades, tensions in the region now have the potential to escalate. The situation could

quickly change from a nationalist conflict to an absolutist religious struggle or from an isolated fight to a regional conflagration. Top American national security officials have called the Middle East the most dangerous flash point in the world. If Clinton was drawn to Middle East peacemaking by rising hopes, Bush will be dragged in by rising fears. The region remains of critical importance to the United States due to the U.S. dependence on affordable oil from the Persian Gulf, its desire to contain a defiant Saddam Hussein, and its special relationship with Israel.

Any American Middle East strategy should therefore include other countries in the region. Apart from Israel, the United States must also consult with its Arab allies, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Although almost no Arab leader wants a war with Israel, one could still break out. The Hizbullah militia, for example, has sought to exploit the current violence by launching cross-border attacks from Lebanon, despite Israel's unilateral exit from that country. Washington has warned Hizbullah's Syrian patrons that it will not restrain Israel from retaliating against Syria for further attacks, which could easily lead to war. Such an Israel-Syria clash could quickly spread. Indeed, there have already been massive public demonstrations in Arab capitals — especially Amman, Cairo, and Rabat — protesting the violence in the West Bank and Gaza. The situation could therefore rapidly spin out of control.

**A Separate Peace** The idea of partitioning the region first arose in 1937, when the United Kingdom, which then held the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, set about to restore order after the Arab riots of the previous year. In its report on the violence, the Peel Commission wrote,

"An irrepressible conflict has arisen between two national communities within the narrow bounds of one small country. There is no common ground between them. Their national aspirations are incompatible. The Arabs desire to revive the traditions of the Arab golden age. The Jews desire to show what they can achieve when restored to the land in which the Jewish nation was born. Neither of the two national ideals permits of combination in the service of a single State. ... But while neither ... can fairly rule all of Palestine, each ... might justly rule part of it."

The idea of partition was accepted by the Jews then but fought tooth and nail by the Arabs. Only half a century later would the Palestinians finally come to accept the commission's logic. For all of Oslo's problems, the ideas of separation and mutual recognition remain its irreducible core and its most important legacy. Peace will come to the region only through partition — not because it is an ennobling or lofty vision, but because there is simply no other way.

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