

# The Escalating Crisis in the Middle East:

## Prospects and Policy (Part II)

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Oct 17, 2000

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### Brief Analysis

On October 13, 2000, David Makovsky, senior fellow at The Washington Institute and former editor of the Jerusalem Post, addressed the Institute's Special Policy Forum along with Robert Satloff. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks. [Read a summary \(templateC05.php?CID=1977\)](#) of Dr. Satloff's remarks.

The Grand Deal on peace is buried for now. Too many factors have conspired against attaining a Grand Deal in the near future, foremost of which include lack of trust, parliamentary arithmetic, and the undermining of the premises of Camp David.

**Lack of Trust** The past two weeks have shaken the Middle East, breeding vast mistrust among its peace partners. The most recent polls show that a record number of Israelis (62 percent) say they do not have a genuine partner for peace in Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Yasir Arafat--the highest level since the beginning of the Oslo peace process in 1993. Even among Israeli moderates, Arafat's stature as a peacemaker has been seriously hurt. They point to the fact that he did not make a public call to halt the violence during the two-week period. Other indications of Arafat's negative attitude include his recent release of numerous Hamas prisoners, including people involved in planning suicide bombings, from PA jails. These actions may portend further spasms of continued violence and the re-escalation of Hamas-led terrorism.

While some have said that Arafat cannot control, much less stemming the flow of violence, Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright have stressed that 100 percent effort is necessary even if it does not yield 100 percent results. If Arafat will not control the violence, then this begs a question of malicious intent; and if he cannot control the violence, then there is a question of ineffectiveness, especially given the fact he has 40,000 policemen and approximately one dozen security services.

**Parliamentary Arithmetic** The overwhelming sentiment of disappointment among Israelis toward Arafat results from the shadow of Camp David II and the enormous concessions granted by Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak falling on the current bout of violence. Violence in this context also reflects poorly on Barak, with the latest polls suggesting that Barak's popularity has dipped even further to only 30 percent support. A narrow coalition government, held up with the support of Israeli Arabs, now seems very unlikely.

This week Barak called for the Likud leader Ariel Sharon to enter into a national unity government. A clear majority of Israelis (70 percent) support this move. For Barak, a national unity government was only a derivative option, that is only possible if the peace process failed. Therefore, the fact that Barak is openly calling for Sharon to enter into the ruling coalition shows that Barak has given up hope on reaching a Grand Deal. A national unity government is not a certainty, however, because of internal Likud politics which may force the party to remain outside of the government. If a national unity government is not in the cards, then Barak's fate will depend on the current crisis with the Palestinians. If the violence has subsided by October 29, when the Knesset reconvenes, then the Knesset will likely call for new elections. If, however, the crisis is still ongoing at the end of October, then the Knesset will probably extend Barak's lease until the situation stabilizes.

**Legacy of Camp David** At least three premises of Camp David II have been undermined in the recent weeks of violence, thereby making future negotiations more difficult. First, the sharing of religious sites has not been honored by the PA as evidenced by the destruction of Joseph's Tomb in Nablus last week, the arson attack last Thursday on an ancient synagogue in Jericho, and the burning of an Israeli police outpost at Lion's Gate after the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Temple Mount two Fridays ago. Second, given the recent civil unrest among Israeli Arabs, Israel's acquiescence, under a plan of family reunification, to the return of thousands of irredentist Palestinians from abroad to areas within its borders will likely be reconsidered. Finally, and most importantly, the cornerstone of Camp David, the idea of reaching the end of the conflict, now seems, given Arafat's lack of credibility, more distant than ever.

**Arafat's Miscalculations** Arafat has certainly gained public international empathy in this recent conflict. Conversely, Arafat has miscalculated in three arenas: Israeli-Palestinian, U.S.-Palestinian, and domestic politics. On the Israeli-Palestinian track, if Arafat's rationale for the current violence is Clausewitzian, that is, that he views violence as an extension of politics and hopes that the current crisis will force the U.S. to redesign its bridging proposals more closely in line with Palestinian positions, then he has severely miscalculated. Arafat's actions very likely closed the door on any further Grand Deal negotiations in the near future. With regard to the U.S.-Palestinian relationship, the current violence has, for the most part, not been received sympathetically in the U.S. Moreover, there is a question of U.S. president Bill Clinton's return on investment, after holding twelve rounds of talks with Arafat--more than Clinton has held with any other foreign leader. To press the point to Arafat that the U.S. will not continue to mediate without results, the two presidential candidates should state publicly that the continued violence of today will have reverberations for the U.S.-Palestinian relationship after January 20, 2001. Finally, Arafat may have miscalculated his own internal political situation. If Arafat ends the peace process in failure, then Hamas and other Palestinian rejectionists will only be vindicated and his own position and historical legacy will be undermined.

**From Cooperation to Separation** Oslo is not dead but has been channeled to something less inspirational, that is, a process of disengagement; from marriage to divorce. Israelis recognize that some kind of process must continue because of the powder keg-like situation; indeed 63 percent of Israelis support the peace process despite a similar percentage lacking faith in Arafat as a peace partner. This separation process will ultimately lead to the establishment of a quasi-state for the Palestinians, far short of what was discussed at Camp David, at least until a new Palestinian leadership takes the reins. Jewish settlements in the territories will be consolidated to ensure that there are no more Netzarim enclaves. Separation must be coordinated because of the close proximity of the two populations and the interlinking of their economies, infrastructures, etc. Coordination is also important for Israeli public opinion, for whom the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon was traumatic. A bad precedent was set with this unilateral action because it departed from the history of negotiation and agreements--a matter duly noted by Hamas. The U.S. should, in this respect, press London and Berlin to dissuade the European Union from recognizing a unilaterally declared Palestinian state and to open their eyes to the bigger picture.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Liat Radcliffe.



Policy #287

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