# Undone Deal:

## The Perils of Peacemaking

by Robert Satloff **(/experts/robert-satloff)**

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After years of running from the legacy of the last Southern Democrat to serve in the White House, Bill Clinton follows in Jimmy Carter's footsteps this week by hosting the first Middle East peace summit in the United States in 20 years. As at Camp David in 1978, the outcome for this meeting, at Maryland's Wye Plantation, is both uncertain and likely to be determined mainly by a president committed to avoiding failure at almost all costs.

Two decades ago, the central characters were an American president who lusted only in his heart, the media-savvy Anwar Sadat, and Menachem Begin, a Polish-born Zionist ideologue. The stakes were high -- after five wars, would the offer of "no more war" be realized or merely join a long list of lost opportunities? And the solutions eventually reached were courageous and far-sighted: the painful trade by Israel of the Sinai Peninsula for a promise of peace; a creative plan, years ahead of its time, to negotiate "autonomy" for the Palestinians; and the commitment of billions of dollars of American aid to grease the wheels of compromise.

Today, the people and stakes are very different. Clinton is, in ways good and bad, certainly no Carter. Yasir Arafat and Benjamin Netanyahu are no Sadat and Begin. According to U.S. law, the PLO leader is still a terrorist on probation, and, in contrast to the lionized Sadat, he is much less popular than the cause he advances. The Israeli prime minister is a fast-talking, Americanized sabra, complete with an MBA, who, in contrast to the lawyerly Begin, achieved power early in life yet has already earned more political enemies than the Likud founder ever did.

As for substance, Wye will not focus on questions of war and peace but rather on the accumulated detritus of the 1993 Oslo accords, a litany of claims and counterclaims left over from several previous "interim" agreements. While the parties may agree to a symbolic opening of long-overdue "final status" talks on Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, and Palestinian "statehood," real bargaining is months, if not years, away.

In one way, however, the Wye summit is likely to resemble its predecessor. The gulf between the parties almost surely will be solved through what has become a familiar formula: Israel gives land; the Palestinians give promises; and America tries to fill the gaps.

The major Israeli concession has already been offered. Nearly a year ago, U.S. officials told Jerusalem that progress required Israeli "redeployment" -- that is, withdrawal -- from 13 percent of the West Bank. Netanyahu cried foul, but

Washington held firm. The result was one of the unhappiest periods in the history of this "special relationship." Last month, Netanyahu finally relented, accepting a U.S. face-saving solution that gives three of the 13 percent to Arafat as a "nature reserve."

While the de facto distinction between the ten percent and the three percent will soon fade, the Israeli concession does clarify the central remaining issue: verifiable steps to implement the still-unfulfilled Palestinian commitment to a "100 percent effort" against terrorism. To do so would require the Palestinians to confiscate or license thousands of illegal weapons held by Palestinians; to close down the "infrastructure" of groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad; to purge the bloated Palestinian security forces of suspected terrorists; to try killers for their crimes rather than for misdemeanors like "disturbing the peace"; and to keep convicted felons in prison for their full sentences.

But that's not all. The two sides must find a formula for the final revocation of offensive articles from the PLO charter, setting the terms for any further Israeli "redeployments," defining additional limits on Israeli settlement activity, and securing from the Palestinians a promise not to derail the process through a declaration of independence when the original Oslo expiration date comes next May. Any one of those items is explosive enough to scuttle the Wye talks. Even so, the success or failure of the summit depends most of all on whether Arafat can satisfy Netanyahu -- and his new foreign minister, Ariel Sharon -- on security. Here, the gaps are wide. With a lifetime record of maintaining a "big tent" approach to the Palestinian cause -- welcoming Maoists or Muslim extremists as long as they were anti-Israel -- Arafat has so far fended off U.S. and Israeli insistence that he roll up the terrorists' fundraising and other front operations.

The Clinton administration has three broad options. First, having won a major territorial concession from Israel, the president could compel Arafat finally to decide between unity (of Palestinian ranks) and progress (toward peace with real security). Alternatively, Clinton could go back to Netanyahu and ask him to add further concessions on security to his concessions on territory -- a scenario that has happened before but carries some political risk just two weeks before a U.S. election. Or, as in the past, Washington could make up the difference through U.S. promises, side letters, assurances, and commitments of aid.

On the key security issue, however, this may prove dangerous. Twenty years ago, Carter helped cement Egyptian-Israeli peace by offering U.S. peacekeepers in the Sinai in the event the United Nations refused to take up the task. That was wise and statesmanlike. However, the U.S.-led Multinational Force and Observers succeeded because its role was limited to routine monitoring of technical arrangements that Egypt and Israel, from the start, meticulously maintained.

Clinton is apparently thinking of updating the Carter model for the 1990s -- using the CIA instead of American troops. Last week, the president sent the director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, to supervise talks on a new Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation deal whereby U.S. intelligence officers would supervise Palestinian compliance with their contractual obligations and, in a de facto sense, adjudicate security disputes between the two sides. In contrast to Sinai peacekeeping, this strategy foresees an unprecedented expansion of America's traditional role as the "honest broker" of peace.

The idea of injecting CIA officers into the interstices of Israeli-Palestinian security relations has great dangers and few advantages. On the plus side, it is a practical solution to an immediate problem: Israeli and Palestinian security officials don't trust each other. If they won't work together, then one solution is, as Netanyahu himself suggested, to let each side work with Americans. The minus side, however, is more compelling. Institutionalizing this new role for U.S. intelligence dilutes its mission. The main task of the CIA station in Israel, as in any allied country, is to liaise with local intelligence agencies. How can the same agency that works alongside Israel on terrorism, missile proliferation, and other threats also serve as an impartial judge in the adversarial relationship between Israel and

the Palestinians?

Also, this on-the-ground role for U.S. intelligence would inject the United States into the daily minutiae of a dispute to which, despite our warm ties with Israel, we are not a party. Washington would be the ultimate arbiter of who has too much blood on his hands to serve in the Palestinian police and when a convicted terrorist should get paroled from a Palestinian jail. Already, the official website of Yasir Arafat's Fatah organization has warned about this new U.S. role: "[E]very inch of land that would be liberated from Israeli Zionist occupation would fall under the control of a new occupier -- the United States."

Third, the new role only accentuates a task -- assessing Palestinian compliance -- for which the administration has a poor track record. A review of the last four years' worth of legally mandated State Department appraisals of Palestinian compliance with Oslo shows that the department has studiously avoided condemning violations. The reason is obvious: the administration knows that an honest account of Palestinian performance would give ammunition to congressional critics eager to cut off aid to the PLO. That logic, however politically pragmatic, does little to assuage those who would count on Washington to be a fair judge of the Palestinians' real performance.

The Wye summit may depend on Clinton's ability to solve the security dilemma, but a breakthrough via the Americanization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the right solution. To be sure, a failed summit would be a political catastrophe, and the acrobatics of the U.S. role -- ally to one party, partner to both -- remains an indispensable ingredient of success. But, for long-term U.S. interests, returning from the Eastern Shore with a "virtual agreement" -- on security or other core issues--only presages more costly problems down the road. ❖

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