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Taking Stock

The Bush Administration and the Roadmap to Peace

Dennis Ross

WHEN the Bush Administration assumed office in January of 2001, it shifted direction in a number of foreign policy areas. Nowhere was the shift in direction and priority more pronounced than in the approach to Arab-Israeli diplomacy. It was not only that the President would not be engaged; it was also that there would be no American envoy to the peace process. Indeed, in the first months of the administration, the very words “peace process” were banned from the public and private lexicon.

The policy was one of disengagement. A number of assumptions seemed to guide the new approach: the Clinton Administration erred in wanting peace more than the parties, with the President having been far too involved; Yasir Arafat was indulged too much; the new Ariel Sharon-led government in Israel would now rule out being able to achieve much; and U.S. interests in the region were threatened far more by Iraq. Dealing with that problem—as opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—was more likely to transform

the landscape of the area.

Whatever one thinks about the wisdom of America’s intensive, high-level engagement in the 1990s, disengagement from peacemaking efforts was clearly not the answer. In the first years of the Bush Administration, with very limited American diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians, the *intifada* was transformed into a war with a vast escalation in the suffering on both sides. For Israelis and Palestinians alike, the price they paid for having no peace process was very high.

To put this in perspective, the number of Israelis killed in the first four months of the *intifada* (until the end of the Clinton Administration) was 42. By June 2003, over 800 Israelis had been killed. Palestinian fatalities went from 350 to nearly 2,500.¹ The wounded amount to ten to twenty times the numbers killed. The economies on both sides have also paid a severe price. While the Israeli economy is in crisis—having declined in absolute terms every year for the last

¹In early 2001, *The Toronto Star* reported that 42 Israelis, as opposed to some 350 Palestinians, had been killed in the first four months of the Al-Aqsa *intifada* (“Global Effort is Necessary to Stop Pain in Mideast”, February 11, 2001). According to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), 841 Israelis have been killed in the period beginning on September 29, 2000, the start of the *intifada*, to August 2003.

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three years—the Palestinian economy has been devastated. More than 60 percent of Palestinians are presently living below the poverty level, and 1.8 million in the West Bank and Gaza are now dependent on subsistence from the UN and other international agencies.²

But there has been another casualty as well: The psyches of both sides have been deeply wounded. Both Israeli and Palestinian publics have come to doubt whether they have a partner in peace on the other side. The problem is less a loss of confidence and more a loss of faith. And that cannot be restored overnight.

The Beginnings of Change

UNDER PRESSURE from Arab leaders, especially Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, the Bush Administration decided to re-engage in Middle Eastern diplomacy in August 2001. The President sent a private letter to the Crown Prince, establishing for the first time that U.S. policy would be to support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³ In addition, the Saudis and others were told that the President would have a brief meeting with Yasir Arafat on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly meetings in New York.

None of this was announced, and September 11 interrupted the advent of a new diplomacy. Given the administration's understandable preoccupation with the war in Afghanistan, a new effort on Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy was put on the backburner. Notwithstanding limited efforts to produce a ceasefire later in fall and early winter 2001–02, the administration's reluctance to engage itself seriously remained the guiding principle of its approach. The hesitancy was reinforced by perceptions that Arafat was doing little to stop terror, had frustrated General Anthony Zinni's effort to negotiate a ceasefire agreement, and had lied to the

administration about trying to smuggle Iranian arms into the territories. Following the IDF's sweep of West Bank cities and an unproductive trip to the region by Secretary Powell in April 2002, the administration again came under increased pressure to do something.

The result was President Bush's speech of June 24, outlining his vision for peace-making. He publicly called for a two-state solution to the conflict. However, by emphasizing a performance-based approach to peace, he effectively told the Palestinians that if they wanted a state they would have to earn it. They must reform themselves, build credible institutions, end corruption, fight terror and create an alternative leadership untainted by terror. If the Palestinians did all this, Israel needed to accept statehood and "end the occupation that began in 1967."⁴

²On July 17, 2003, *The Financial Times* reported that 50 percent of the Palestinian population is currently unemployed, while 60 percent lives below the poverty line (Christopher Patten, "A Road Map Paid for in Euros", *The Financial Times*, July 17, 2003). In his speech on May 26, 2003, Prime Minister Sharon mentioned the dependence of over half the Palestinian population on foreign aid as a key determinant for ending the occupation. Speaking before the Knesset, the Israeli premier asked, "Today, 1.8 million Palestinians live thanks to support from international organizations. Do you want to take responsibility for them yourselves?" (Chris McGreal, "Peace hopes lie heavy on new force", *The Guardian*, June 3, 2003).

³While the Clinton parameters presented to the two sides in December 2000 would have provided for an independent Palestinian state, the parameters represented ideas to resolve the differences between the two sides, were never stated as formal policy, and were withdrawn at the end of the administration.

⁴Published on April 30, 2003, the roadmap called for a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on two states, Israel and Palestine. Linked to this resolution, the

While long on exhortation and short on plans, the President's speech did create a new basis for the international community to address the issue. Palestinian reform became the focal point for activity, with emphasis put on creating transparency and accountability in the Palestinian Authority (PA). But translating this new emphasis into a new reality on the ground was bound to be difficult. There was nothing immediately practical in terms of what had been proposed. Reform as an objective was very important, but it was unlikely to be achievable unless the Israelis would relax their grip on the territories so reformers could move, meet and plan. For its part, the Israeli government might be a supporter of Palestinian reform—particularly if it meant sidelining Arafat—but it was not inclined to relax its grip on the territories if the result of doing so would be new terror attacks in Israel.

The stalemate remained. Finding a mechanism to act on the President's vision is what gave birth to the concept of a roadmap.

Tactical Objective, Strategic Consequence

IRONICALLY, it was Arab leaders who initially raised the concept of a roadmap, notwithstanding their concern that the President's speech demanded too much from Palestinians and too little from Israelis. Desperate for the United States to intervene, they embraced the President's ultimate vision but called for a plan—a roadmap—to get there.

Here again, the administration did not rush to develop a roadmap. Arab leaders and Europeans were pleading for one to act on the President's words. Both argued that the U.S. position in the Middle East was being threatened by the administration's reluctance to defuse the Israeli-Palestinian war and its apparent eagerness to go to war with Saddam

Hussein. Faced with the uncertainty of who to deal with on the Palestinian side and with the tactical need to gain support for its Iraq policy—or at least the prospect of acquiescence in it—the administration agreed to work with the EU, the UN and Russia in forging a roadmap to carry out the President's vision. While the United States would not let these other countries determine its response to Iraq, it would let them shape the conduct of U.S. diplomacy between the Israelis and Palestinians—an unprecedented step in the U.S. approach to Arab-Israeli issues. Few things better indicate that the real objective here had less to do with Middle East peace and much more to do with the Bush Administration's Iraq policy. Arabs, Europeans and others would find it easier to tolerate what the United States was doing in Iraq if the administration could point to its making a serious effort on Israeli-Palestinian peace—or so the thinking went.

This tactical objective led to a reversal of the traditional approach to Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Rather than working out understandings with the parties, the administration engaged in a negotiation

roadmap specifies, "the settlement will resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and end the occupation that began in 1967, based on the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, UNSCRs 242, 338 and 1397, agreements previously reached by the parties, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah—endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit—calling for acceptance of Israel as a neighbor living in peace and security, in the context of a comprehensive settlement." During his speech on June 24, 2002, President Bush outlined a similar principle, defining the parameters of a two-state solution to mean "that the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended through a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, with Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognized borders."

with the members of the Quartet (the United States, EU, UN and Russia). Consequently, the roadmap reflected agreement with parties that had no responsibility for carrying out even one of the steps for which they were calling. Conversely, the parties that would have to implement these steps were presented the roadmap after the Quartet had already agreed to it. They were each offered the opportunity to make comments but not to engage in a negotiation about its content or how it might actually be implemented. Perhaps the need to avoid negotiating with Yasir Arafat—as well as the desire to have an international consensus that would be difficult to reject—influenced the administration's approach.

By definition, however, the roadmap could never be brought to life if it were based only on the understandings of outsiders. Indeed, it could only materialize with clear and unambiguous understandings between the “insiders” on what each side would actually do, when they would do it, where they would do it and how they would do it. Not surprisingly, the roadmap, once unveiled, could not actually be launched without an agreed trigger. Though President Bush publicly announced the roadmap in March, before the beginning of the war in Iraq, it took active diplomacy in June, after the Aqaba summit to produce an agreement on initial steps that each side might take.

The Impact of the War in Iraq

DEFEATING Saddam was never going to yield peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The conflict between two national movements with competing historic claims to the same territory was not created by Saddam Hussein and was not going to be resolved by his demise. But the war and the fall of Saddam's regime did have an impact on U.S. diplomacy and on

the Israelis and Palestinians. For his part, President Bush—as part of the effort to build support for the war—made promises to a number of leaders, including Arab leaders, that he would make a serious effort on Israeli-Palestinian peace after dealing with Saddam Hussein. The more he repeated this privately, the more he became sincerely wedded to doing it, and the roadmap, whatever the initial motives the administration had for it, suddenly became the President's avowed policy.

As for the Israelis and the Palestinians, neither wanted to say no to President Bush, who glowed in the aftermath of Saddam's defeat. Prime Minister Sharon—knowing that most Israelis believed that the United States had removed a strategic threat to Israel—was not about to reject an initiative by the triumphant President. Similarly, neither Arafat nor Palestinian reformist leaders had any interest in denying a U.S. initiative under these circumstances. On the contrary, Palestinians sought the intervention of the world's only superpower to transform the situation on the ground.

There is a big difference, however, between avoiding saying no, on the one hand, and actually saying yes to the specifics of what the United States might be asking, on the other. Not rejecting the U.S. initiative was consistent with wanting to stop the war. Saying yes might mean moving toward the difficult decisions involved in peacemaking. Such a positive response requires a different mindset—one which must demonstrate a willingness to confront constituencies that resist compromise and think not only in terms of their own political needs but their counterpart's as well. While Saddam's defeat did not necessarily create these impulses on either side, it did suggest that change was possible and that the moment should be seized at least to produce relief for both sides.

In this sense, the President's initiative came at a moment when both Israelis and

Palestinians were ready to stop the day-to-day struggle that was imposing such pain on each of them. On this point, they basically agreed. Their “agreement” did not extend to the content of peace negotiations or even to the content of the roadmap. But it did reflect important developments within each society.

New Realities

AMONG Palestinians, the attitude toward the violence had begun to change in the period preceding the war in Iraq. Though a majority of Palestinians favored violence from the beginning of the *intifada*—especially as a way to inflict pain on Israelis who were inflicting pain on them—this sentiment began to change in early 2003. In February, polls indicated that a slim majority now opposed the violence. By June, that slim majority became a more decisive one, with 73 percent of the Palestinians in the territories favoring an end to it.⁵ Palestinians were longing for a return to a more normal life—one in which the Israeli siege could be lifted and movement of people and goods could be restored. No end to the violence would mean no lifting of the checkpoints.

Under duress, Yasir Arafat appointed Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as the first-ever prime minister of the Palestinian Authority. The administration skillfully used the Palestinian desire for American intervention to increase the pressure on Arafat to make the appointment, saying it could only unveil the roadmap when there was a credible prime minister. Arafat may have made the appointment only because of international pressure, but it was Palestinian reformers who first raised the idea of a prime minister. Indeed, Palestinian pressure on Arafat for reform pre-dated President Bush’s June 24 speech, emerging when no one predicted it. Following the Israeli operation “Defensive Shield” of March–May 2002, in which the

IDF entered every Palestinian city in the West Bank except Jericho and destroyed extensive parts of the old cities of Jenin and Nablus as they sought to root out terrorist cells, most observers expected the Palestinians to be driven by their anger at Israel. No doubt there was anger, but the overwhelming sentiment in the territories after Defensive Shield was the desire for reform. Reconstruction was what Palestinians wanted: they did not want to reconstruct the “rot” that had been Yasir Arafat’s government.⁶

Palestinians were not prepared to embrace efforts to unseat their icon Yasir Arafat, but they wanted him to share power. The emergence of Abu Mazen as prime minister represented what reformers had sought, even if his cabinet, being the product of difficult negotiations with Arafat, was not exactly what they had in mind. No one on the Palestinian side had more consistently opposed violence than Abu Mazen. At one point, he publicly challenged those, including Arafat, who argued for the *intifada*, saying that it yielded the opposite of their stated goals: it extended Israeli occupation, tightened

⁵A survey conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research from June 19–22 found that 73 percent of Palestinians favored a *hudna*, a one-year voluntary cessation of violence against Israelis. Moreover, 80 percent of respondents favored a joint Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire of unlimited duration.

⁶A poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research from May 15–18, 2000 found that 91 percent of Palestinians supported “fundamental reforms” in the Palestinian Authority. Equally noteworthy, respondents favored a number of specific actions by a wide majority—including 85 percent supporting unification of security services, 95 percent supporting the dismissal of ministers accused of mismanagement or corruption, 83 percent supporting holding elections and 92 percent supporting the adoption of a basic law or constitution.

the Israeli control of East Jerusalem and strengthened Prime Minister Sharon. To Abu Mazen, the continued violence was producing a disaster for Palestinians and threatening the cause itself.

The new Palestinian Prime Minister was not alone in this assessment. Critical support for stopping the violence came from Tanzim leaders. The Tanzim are the Fatah activists who control much of the grassroots organization, especially in the cities of the West Bank. Though Marwan Barghouti is certainly the most prominent Tanzim leader, the Tanzim tends to be more of a horizontal than a vertical organization. Their leaders produced the first *intifada* from 1987–90 and have played an important role in the second one. As several of their leaders explained to me in June, they initially believed that this *intifada* would prove to the Israelis that force would not work on the Palestinians. Instead, it was now clear that force could work against either side. Worse, as the *intifada* continued, their agenda of a two-state solution, produced through negotiations, was being supplanted by the Hamas agenda of ongoing struggle. Lest there be a break in the situation, they were now concerned that the ability to produce a two-state solution could be lost.

The push for a ceasefire came strongly from the Tanzim and certainly also reflected the mood of the Palestinian public. In these circumstances, Hamas was not about to oppose a ceasefire, believing that it could use the respite to rebuild, and that sooner or later the Israelis would create a pretext for going back to the struggle.

In Israel, there was also a readiness to transform the situation. Certainly, the Israeli public was ready for it, with two-thirds opposing the resumption of targeted killings by the IDF.⁷ But coupled with the desire to see the violence end was a feeling that the Palestinians, having imposed the recent violence on

Israel, must show they were serious about stopping it.

With the emergence of Abu Mazen as prime minister, the Israeli public and Prime Minister Sharon saw an opportunity. With President Bush's initiative, he saw a need, but the ongoing economic crisis in Israel also motivated him. Sharon came to believe that Israel's economy could not recover unless the war with the Palestinians stopped—and for the first time he publicly began to say so. His call to his constituency to understand that Israel must give up the occupation and be ready to “divide the land” was justified in terms of the occupation not being good for Israelis, for Palestinians or for “Israel's economy.”

Exhaustion on both sides certainly helps to explain why there may now be a moment to end the war and resume a peace process. Can a peace process now be successful? Is the roadmap the vehicle for producing success?

*The Problems Ahead*⁸

THE ROADMAP is not a detailed plan. Having been forged with outside parties, it lacks the clarity and definition to be any-

⁷Following the failed IDF attack against Hamas leader Abdelaziz Al-Rantissi, a poll published in the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot* found that 67 percent of Israelis opposed the recommencement of targeted killings. Within that group, 58 percent backed a temporary suspension of strikes against militant leaders in order to afford Abbas an opportunity to curb the activities of extremist groups. Only 9 percent of Israelis objected to the policy of targeted killings irrespective of circumstances (“Poll: Israelis Oppose Military Strikes”, *Associated Press*, June 13, 2003).

⁸This issue was going to press as Prime Minister Abbas resigned on September 6, but the prescriptions for Abbas contained herein apply equally to his successor.

thing other than a set of guidelines. Its basic concept makes sense: establish mutual obligations and phases designed to restore an environment in which the two sides can, in time, once again tackle the core issues of the conflict.⁹

Truth be told, the roadmap tries to create a pathway that restores the core bargain of Oslo: The Israelis get security. The Palestinians get their freedom. Both sides assume responsibilities to fulfill their side of that bargain. This is a fair sounding proposition in theory, but devilishly difficult to translate into reality.

The two sides were not involved in developing the roadmap, so it should come as no surprise that they would each try to redefine it. The Israelis have been public about their concerns and created 14 conditions—primarily related to security and sequence—that the current administration has promised to “take into account.” The Palestinians have publicly accepted the roadmap without qualification; nonetheless, they are trying to redefine it in its application. For example, the *budna*, or truce declared as an agreement among Palestinian factions, is not a part of the roadmap. There is supposed to be an immediate, unconditional ceasefire, with the commencement of arrests and the dismantling of terrorist infrastructure. But Abu Mazen explained that he needed to build his capabilities before taking on the main Palestinian obligations in the first phase of the roadmap. He is betting that, with calm, the Israelis will take steps both within and outside of the roadmap that will allow him to show he is delivering. By showing that his way works, that life for Palestinians improves, he will build his authority and his leverage on groups like Hamas.

The irony is not lost on the Israelis: a roadmap that was to pressure the Palestinians to produce first on security issues before Israel had to take difficult steps is one that in practice pressures the Israelis to perform prior to Abu Mazen

fulfilling his side of the bargain. Indeed, this irony even extends to items not in the roadmap—neither Palestinian prisoners nor the “fence” are addressed in the roadmap, but releasing prisoners and halting construction of the security fence in the West Bank have become part of the new list of Palestinian needs. Israel, recognizing its stake in Abu Mazen’s success, released some prisoners, lifted some checkpoints and even planned additional withdrawals. But the Israelis were never likely to withdraw extensively prior to seeing more of a Palestinian effort to constrain terrorist groups and their capabilities in additional areas of the West Bank. Moreover, Sharon was unlikely to carry out the tough steps that the roadmap calls for in the first phase—freezing all settlement activity and dismantling all unauthorized settler outposts established since March 2001—before seeing Abu Mazen take the tough decision to dismantle terrorist infrastructures in the West Bank and Gaza.

Even should Abu Mazen begin to build his authority, it will not be easy to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. Old habits die hard, and Palestinians abhor the idea of civil conflict (*fitna*). Moreover, there is another paradox: the longer the *budna* goes on, the more Palestinians will likely say, “why rock the boat? Why invite civil war?” For the Palestinians, and the Arab world generally, Palestinian obligations in the roadmap have come to be

⁹The first phase is designed to produce Palestinian reform and Israeli security, with the Palestinians cracking down on the infrastructure of terror in their areas and the Israelis withdrawing their forces to where they were in September 2000. The second phase involves the creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders, creating at least juridical equality between Israelis and Palestinians as they negotiate on the existential questions of borders, Jerusalem and refugees. The third phase is supposed to resolve those basic questions.

understood as doing the *budna* and nothing more. Somehow, everything else is up to the Israelis.

Naturally, Yasir Arafat adds to Abu Mazen's challenges in this regard. While claiming that he accepts the roadmap, Arafat opposes the disarming of the groups—especially the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—and criticized Abu Mazen for not getting more from the Israelis for the ceasefire. Recall that the roadmap calls for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire. This was not something to be negotiated but adopted. For Arafat, however, highlighting Abu Mazen's failings are essential to demonstrating his own indispensability. He needs Abu Mazen to fail to prove that he (Arafat) is not the problem. In this regard, Arafat's own iconic status, as well as his control of half of the security apparatus, makes him a formidable obstacle to implementing the roadmap.

Does this mean the roadmap cannot succeed? No, but it is important to remember that, at this stage, the parties are not even talking about the core issues of the conflict. To succeed, even on the initial challenges of the first phase, very intensive U.S. efforts will be required.

Lessons from the Past

ISRAELI AND Palestinian expectations about the roadmap continue to be different. The United States cannot afford for each to believe that the other will take certain steps when it cannot or will not. If Abu Mazen cannot deliver soon in certain areas, we must work out what he will do, when he will do it and what he needs from the Israelis to do it. For example, even more than releases of prisoners, Abu Mazen urgently needs to show that checkpoints are being lifted and, at least in some areas of the West Bank, the transit of people and goods is being restored. What do the Israelis require to withdraw from certain cities and the areas around them? What

kind of responsibilities must they see the Palestinian security forces assuming to enable them to do this? If there are acts of terror, what would it take for the Israelis to refrain from carrying out targeted killings? The administration's role now must be to pose, and help resolve, such questions.

On the basic issue of dealing with the terrorist infrastructure—which will soon confront Abu Mazen in a moment of truth—the United States needs to take several steps. First, it will need to publicize what is expected of both sides. Abu Mazen will need a public posture from the United States on the Palestinian obligations under the roadmap to explain why certain actions are necessary, especially if the Palestinians are to see performance from the Israelis. (Sharon will need this no less than Abu Mazen.) Second, the United States should conduct three-way security discussions with the Israelis and the Palestinians and reach an understanding on which steps would be most feasible for dealing with the terrorist infrastructure. While the Palestinians have every reason to emphasize the daunting nature of this challenge, the history of confronting Hamas should not be ignored. In the past, when there were confrontations with the PA, it was Hamas that always retreated, and it was not only because of relative strengths but also because they, too, shied away from civil war. Third, Abu Mazen and Muhammad Dahlan, the Palestinian minister of security, need capabilities—especially vehicles, command and control support and communications equipment—which the United States has promised but not yet provided. This should be a high priority, and, if we have a problem furnishing it quickly, the Bush Administration should go to its European or Arab partners to fill the gap. (In 1994, the United States provided vehicles from excess stocks in Europe, and Secretary of State Warren Christopher literally arrived with a C-130

carrying vehicles for the Palestinian police.)

This raises the larger question of assistance. The Israelis are not the only ones who can take steps to demonstrate that Abu Mazen is delivering. Knowing its stake in showing that Abu Mazen is making a difference for Palestinians, the administration should have focused on generating a rapid infusion of material assistance. It should have used the G-8 for this purpose; it should now organize a donor conference with very specific targeted projects in mind. Everywhere the Israelis pull out, there should be highly visible projects to aid in the reconstruction immediately. Abu Mazen must be seen not only affecting Israeli behavior, but also producing tangible assistance from the international community quickly. This, of course, also requires Abu Mazen to identify critical projects with Palestinian managers ready to take charge of them with their international counterparts.

Politically, the administration will also have to give meaning to its readiness to monitor the implementation of the roadmap. John Wolf, the head of a U.S. monitoring team, cannot perform that role adequately unless clear standards of performance are established. The roadmap created the illusion of specificity. It contains 52 paragraphs, with extensive obligations enumerated for each side. Monitoring of its implementation ought to be straightforward, but it is not because each side interprets each obligation differently. The Israelis interpret the Palestinian obligations—making arrests, collecting illegal weaponry and dismantling terrorist capabilities and infrastructure—far more expansively than the Palestinians. In turn, the Palestinians interpret the Israeli responsibilities—improving the humanitarian situation, stopping the confiscation of property, dismantling unauthorized settler outposts and freezing all settlement activity, including natural growth—far more

expansively than the Israelis. Presently, there is no definition of what would constitute performance by either side. Whose interpretation are we monitoring? What constitutes fulfillment of obligations?

One of the most important failings of the Oslo process was its lack of accountability. Absent this, neither side felt it necessary to fulfill its obligations. This is a critical lesson from the past, and President Bush has been right to say that the United States will hold each side accountable. But there will be no way to do so until very clear standards of what constitutes progress on every obligation.

If the United States imposes its own criteria without discussing the matter both bilaterally and multilaterally, it runs the risk of creating standards that cannot be met. The Bush Administration must strike a balance between what is feasible and also meaningful—without getting into long, drawn out negotiations with each side and the other members of the Quartet. But the administration will have to resolve the issue of standards, preferably sooner rather than later, all while recognizing that it may make one or both sides unhappy in the process.

This sounds like a daunting task, and indeed it is. Unfortunately, no peace process can be had on the cheap. Maybe, the United States can sustain a period of calm for longer than three months because both sides want a tactical respite. But at this point the administration has not yet re-established a peace process. Obligations are being avoided more than they are being implemented. If the ceasefire is to last, if the current moment is to be translated into something more than only a ceasefire, then the United States is going to have to do what it takes to create accountability—a goal to which the administration has not yet come close.

Two other lessons from the past must be integrated into the administration's approach. Israeli and Palestinian leaders must condition their publics for peace,

and Arab leaders must assume real responsibilities. Oslo was plagued by the absence of any serious or systematic effort to get both publics ready for compromise. On the Israeli side, under Barak there was at least some conditioning, even if it was largely done through press leaks. Somehow, at any rate, the far-reaching concessions that Barak contemplated came as no surprise to his public. Palestinians, on the other hand, were never told they would have to compromise on the core issues. On the contrary, Arafat repeatedly emphasized to the Palestinians that they would get everything, never suggesting they might have to compromise.

At this point, Ariel Sharon has begun speaking about painful compromises and the division of the land. He has accepted Palestinian statehood. But this is a state without borders, powers or a capital. No one should expect Sharon to offer his fundamental concessions in advance of a negotiating process, but at some point the Israeli public needs to hear that Israeli withdrawals will form a part of a negotiating process; that Israel must give up control of Palestinians; that no viable independent Palestinian state can be surrounded by Israel; and that a viable Palestinian state must have territorial contiguity, not an illusory contiguity that would come by connecting different parts of the West Bank by tunnels and bridges.

For his part, Abu Mazen needs to build his authority before he can begin to condition Palestinian attitudes towards compromise on existential questions of self-definition and identity. But sooner or later this will be necessary. It will not be easy, given a history in which any compromise on the core issues has been treated like a betrayal. It certainly will not be easy as long as Yasir Arafat retains a leading role: he will accuse Palestinian leaders of selling out if they even hint at accepting less than total capitulation on borders, the status of Jerusalem and refugees.

That, of course, is exactly what peace requires: curbing expectations and surrendering mythologies.

This is why Arab leaders must assume responsibilities in the process. Ariel Sharon cannot prepare his public to make hard choices if the Palestinians are avoiding making any of their own. There will never be a Palestinian state unless the Palestinian leadership is willing to confront those who remain determined to use the territories to attack Israelis. So long as the terrorist infrastructure is intact, how can a Palestinian state—even one with provisional borders—be recognized? To confront groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Abu Mazen and the Palestinian leadership will need Arab public backing. They will need the umbrella of legitimacy that Arab states can provide.

Arab backing is also a prerequisite for neutralizing Arafat and for justifying the idea of making hard compromises. This Arab willingness must consist not simply in pressuring Arafat, but also in it publicly criticizing his efforts to subvert Abu Mazen's policies. Few steps are more likely to temper Arafat's behavior than the possibility that the Arabs question him publicly on his stewardship of the Palestinian cause. Arafat has always directly identified himself with the cause, and Arab leaders have tacitly accepted that formulation.

Similarly, an Arab willingness to broach the idea of compromise to the Palestinians could make it far more palatable for Palestinians to do so. Supporting the need for internal confrontation when necessary, neutralizing Arafat and being prepared to reaffirm the necessity of compromise on the part of the Palestinians as well as the Israelis would represent a sea-change for the Arab world and give a genuine peace process a chance to succeed. A sea-change, indeed, for Arab leaders have always found it useful to pledge their hearts and souls to the Palestinian cause—provid-

ed, of course, that it cost them nothing.

Surely, no single cause in the Arab Middle East is more evocative than the Palestinian one. No one wants to be on the wrong side of this issue. No single Arab leader wants to be accused by Arafat of asking the Palestinians to surrender their national rights, and this is the real reason no one criticized Arafat for turning down the Clinton ideas in December 2000, even as President Mubarak, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah of Jordan, President Ben Ali of Tunisia and King Mohammad of Morocco all conveyed to President Clinton the sentiment that the ideas were historic.

Arab leaders must assume their proper role, or there will be no success in the near term, when Abu Mazen must confront Hamas and company, or in the long

term, on the core issues, without Arab leaders assuming their part. Their own insecurity and sense of vulnerability may again intrude on their assuming responsibilities. The key will be how they evaluate the impact of a continuing war between Israelis and Palestinians on their polities and their rules. Will it foment anger towards them on their streets? Or will it remain an issue that generates anger and hostility that can be more easily deflected onto the United States?

One thing is certain: No peace process will succeed without the Arabs. If they decide that their stability depends on ending the conflict, they may finally do their part. In such a circumstance, the United States will have to do its part, which includes making sure that no one is let off the hook. □