



THE GENEVA PROPOSALS FOR PEACE: STILL VIABLE?

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CHAS. W. FREEMAN, JR., president, Middle East Policy Council

We're here today to talk about an issue of remarkable timeliness and an issue of great seriousness. As of the beginning of this week, 872 Israelis and 2,845 Palestinians had died since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifida on September 29, 2000. To put this in perspective in proportion to population, 872 Israelis equates to roughly 41,000 Americans and 2,845 Palestinians equates to roughly 235,000 Americans. If the death of 3,000 Americans and others on September 11 was enough to give the United States the equivalent of a nervous breakdown, you can imagine what might be the impact on Israelis of those losses coming after the Holocaust and on the Palestinians of catastrophic deaths on that scale.

We've seen over the last several years a turn away from an effort to negotiate a peace and toward unilateralism on both sides. Yesterday we learned that Mr. Sharon, who has been unwilling or unable to negotiate with the Palestinians, had decided instead to negotiate with George Bush and the United States. The problem, of course, is that the issues concerned are not within the power of the United States to dispose. That, it seems to me, is the fundamental issue, not the extent to which what has now been agreed between the president and the prime minister ignores international law or the opinions of the international community. But I think most Arabs, unfortunately, will now be convinced that the United States is completely part of the problem and no longer part of the solution. We will no doubt pay a price for that.

This background – rather unexpected, probably welcome in Florida if not in the Middle East at large – makes today's discussion truly timely. The Geneva accords, like the Oslo accords on which they're built, were negotiated directly between Israelis and Palestinians with minimal foreign involvement. In this case, as in the case of the Oslo accords, they had to turn to Europeans rather than to Americans to reach an agreement. This is itself a sad commentary on the state of our affairs as they relate to the Middle East. But unlike the Oslo agreements, the Geneva accords actually define most elements



of final status, not just the process by which one would get there. They thus meet a very important test of credibility. After the experience of the Oslo accords and Madrid, no one in the Middle East, Israeli or Palestinian, is prepared to buy a pig in a poke. Of course, as Jews and Muslims, they wouldn't have bought a pig anyway, but the metaphor stands.

Are the Geneva accords the basis on which agreement between the parties might yet emerge once they have exhausted unilateralism and its possibilities? Are they proof, as some would argue, that negotiations in fact can succeed despite all the differences in bridging the gaps between the parties? Or are they now, as I think Mr. Sharon would argue and the leaders of Hamas would argue, irrelevant? This is the issue I hope we will explore today.

ZIAD J. ASALI, president, American Task Force on Palestine

The Hall of Justice in Geneva was packed with dignitaries, delegates, hardened peaceniks and guests from Palestine, Israel, the Arab world, Europe and the United States. The festive celebration with speeches, music and live performances, was correctly and evenly divided between Israelis and Palestinians in joint appearances while a full court of world media was providing sympathetic attention – an auspicious and promising occasion.

That was the launching of the Geneva accord, a document that Yossi Beilin described as “a virtual agreement” and Yasser Abed Rabbo hailed as “a triumph of peace and reason” as he held Yossi's hand high and called on an impressive array of stars to join them on the stage. That celebration was followed by a triumphant visit of the delegation to the United States with high profile political meetings and media coverage. As I recall these events of last December and witness the harsh realities of life grinding away hope and reason in Palestine and Israel, I must admit that I felt at the time that the term “virtual” was more appropriate than Yossi meant. It meant unreal and unrealistic. It was a premature celebration about what might be and not what is.

The Geneva accord agreement fleshes out the difficult details of the final-status issues that all negotiators or framers of documents about peace have studiously avoided. Courageously and methodically it deals with the contentious issues and proposes solutions that reasonable, patriotic, experienced negotiators worked out with sufficient compromises achieved and red lines held or shifted to make the overall project achievable. In short, it's a reasonable document signed by reasonable people who care about lasting peace. It represents, by any survey or poll you read, the majority position of Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs, Europeans and Americans, and it's consistent with all the codified international agreements about the Palestine-Israel conflict.

This, unfortunately, is not the full story. It leaves out crucial details – details about the attitudes and relative power of the people opposed to it. It is my purpose to use the time allotted me today, to explore this opposition, what it means and how we can deal with it. It is my contention that the conflict has been unresolved because its main ingredient has not been starkly defined and clearly pursued by its advocates.

The Palestine-Israel conflict has always been one between those who accepted the reality and the finality of the outcome of the war of 1948 and those who never have and



seem not to ever be so inclined. The initial and clear demarcation between Israelis and Jews on the one hand and Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims on the other defined this conflict in its early years. However, it gradually and imperceptibly shifted and can no more be neatly packaged as Palestinians versus Israelis, Arabs versus Jews or Muslims against Christians.

For the Palestinians, supported by the majority of Arabs and Muslims, 1948 was injustice personified in the establishment of Israel on 78 percent of the land of Palestine. They suffered a loss of land, country, position, dignity, power and a place of their own. Decades of life and political experience to redress this injustice have educated the majority to the need to accept a historic compromise for a state in the West Bank and Gaza with a capital in Jerusalem in exchange for accepting the permanent reality of the existence of the state of Israel.

The people who oppose this compromise oppose Geneva. They may or may not have given their true reasons for their opposition. They wrapped it in religious, leftist or nationalist rhetorical garb, but they have, in essence, opposed a compromise, and hence its credible instrument, Geneva. This does not mean that there were no other reasons for Palestinian opposition. There were, and those reasons need to be talked about publicly and honestly. The right of return: the biggest club was wielded in public to put the Geneva advocates on the defensive and have them fend for themselves against charges of treason. Notwithstanding the detailed section of the finer points about refugees and the redefinition of the right of return that Geneva provided, the perception was created and it stuck, that the negotiators have given up that right.

The reality is that there is a difference between the possibility of the return of several million Palestinians to Israel, which is not realistic, and the right – the mere right – of the refugees to their possessions that they left in '48. Geneva tried to make that distinction implicitly. In the final analysis, Israel has to find the words to redress the grievances inflicted on the Palestinians in the *nakba* of 1948, and these words given two generations after the fact will help make reconciliation and peace possible. These words should be part of the grand agreement of final peace.

Another legitimate criticism of Geneva is that unauthorized parties negotiated this document in secret. No people have suffered more from lack of democracy and participation with so much at stake than have the Palestinian people. It is right, proper and unavoidable for the implementation of any agreement about their fate to have the people vote on it. It is in this context, and even more so in the context of the impending withdrawal from Gaza, that Palestinian elections should be held soon. Elections with a referendum on the two-state solution would provide legitimate representatives authorized to make the decisions on behalf of Palestine. It is necessary to point out that the Geneva accord is not an official agreement but a framework for one to be negotiated between elected parties. A conflict this long, which has captured the attention of billions of people all over the world, cannot and should not be resolved without a public vote. A referendum would provide the ultimate validation of any agreement for the resolution of this conflict.

On the other hand, the Israeli public perceived the people who negotiated the Geneva agreement as left-wing peaceniks. Some of them were branded as traitors and threat-



ened by public officials with legal proceedings. The Israeli counterpart to the Palestinian rejectionists of the outcome of '48 was equipped with a much more formidable tool to fight with and to discredit Geneva with by virtue of its hold on the reins of government in Israel. Dreams of a greater Israel, at least including Judea and Samaria, the linguistic erasure of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, dominated the thinking of the military-political elite that ruled Israel.

A military solution to them was not only possible but the only way to deal with Palestinians, who understand nothing but force. A climate of fear generated by suicide bombings has driven the majority to support the occupation and its iron fist. However, life and political reality have gradually, but obviously not completely, tamed this policy. The withdrawal from Gaza, among other things, is an expression of the limits of military power. Holding on to the West Bank is a continuation of the idea that 1948 did not define the borders of the final conflict, and negotiations by military and other means go on.

These harsh policies will, if continued, inevitably and predictably empower the religious extremists in Palestine. Palestinian advocates for peace, with a relentless occupier who offers no possibility of an independent state, will be branded as cowards and weaklings. The upsurge of Hamas and Jihad in public opinion polls in recent years is a harbinger of things to come if present trends are not checked. This is a challenge for real political partners across the ethnic, national and religious divide. It is their fault if they fail to seek each other and connect.

The political reality at this time is that this is no longer a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews, Christians and Muslims. It is rather between those who accept the presence of two viable states living in peace alongside each other and those who don't. Palestinians, Israelis, Arabs, Jews, Christians and Muslims are in each camp, and those within each camp have much more in common with each other than they do with their tribal affiliates. The political opponents of peace on each side think that time is on their side, and in the meantime they have exercised their veto power politically and by force to torpedo Geneva or any accord that will define the end of 1948. The will of the majority has been thwarted and that of an energetic, impassioned, suspicious and violent minority is on the other side.

A viable unoccupied Palestine alongside Israel is the only prescription for peace. It is for this reason that we must keep the Roadmap alive and quit making references to its early demise, as we must exert all effort to generate political muscle behind the final status outlined by the Geneva accord. Israel's withdrawal from Gaza can and should be made to fit in this grand vision. The challenge for all parties is to turn this into an opportunity to rebuild a new order in Gaza, one that will be the first solid step for the Palestinians to establish an independent, viable and democratic state.

Israel, or that segment of it that wants security and peace, will have to define the risks of such a move and take them. The Palestinian majority must seize this opportunity to plan and build rather than to passively watch, complain and assign blame. The United States will be wise to find a way to deliver to the Palestinians tangible benefits to reclaim its credibility as it promises them an acceptable peace. Now more than ever, because of Iraq and the problem of international terrorism, the United States has to exert itself to



avoid policies on Palestine that might provide succor to its committed enemies.

Partners of peace on all sides must find each other and roll up their sleeves. The resolution of this defining issue of our time will take vision, courage and toil.

MARSHALL BREGER, professor, Columbus School of Law, The Catholic University of America

I'm a reluctant critic of Geneva. It's an important heuristic effort. It keeps hope alive. It's a kind of lantern out there that one can point to, but let's cut through to the reality: the public has already rejected it. Khalil Shikaki, the Palestinian pollster, recently told me that when he asks: do you like the Geneva plan? He gets around 20 percent. When he then describes the Geneva "package," but he doesn't call it the Geneva plan – he calls it the Oman plan – he gets around 42 percent. So already the term drags you down 22 percent in the Palestinian public. As to the Israelis, a recent Jaffe Center poll shows that around 76 percent of them are against it.

So I think the important question is to ask why, and I think there are a number of reasons. First, let's be blunt, it's a top-down elitist project of intellectuals and ministers out of government. It was done quietly; maybe it had to be that way, but the result is that it did not build a grass-roots following. Furthermore, it is overly intellectual. The great Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua, who himself is a bit of a leftist, has said recently, "Yossi Beilin built this sort of clock; he knows just where every wheel will be placed in the peace clock, and the unilateral pullout suddenly undoes all his work. I respect Beilin. He has a worldview; he has presence of mind. But there was something dogmatic in the way he steered the process. There was something overzealous in the way he wanted to take it to the very end." I think that the public picked up on that perception.

Second, the accord is based on trust, just as Oslo was. Oslo failed for many reasons, but one was that there was no trust. And there's even less trust now. That is the reality, and that's reflected in what the polls show. Third, one of the most difficult aspects for the whole Geneva approach is that it is an integrated clock. It's an end of conflict, total deal, and you're not going to get that in a context where there is no trust.

Finally, it is also unclear who the partners are. The Israeli public doesn't see strong support for Geneva in the Palestinian leadership. And the Palestinian community doesn't see strong support for it outside of a small group of the Israeli peace camp. So, while I think it was important that the Geneva exercise was undertaken, I don't think we can look to Geneva for very much hope in the future.

What options do we have? We could wait for new players on the scene, wait for changed circumstances. But there is a cost in waiting, a lot of deaths. Or we can do something unilateral. I would not have done exactly what Sharon has done unilaterally, but it reflects an understandable impulse. I do not think one should abandon all hope when one looks at what the Sharon plan is and is going to do. Of course, in a zero-sum world, Sharon is happy so the Palestinians have to be worse off. It would be vice versa if the Palestinians were happy, but I think there are aspects to what is happening now that at least open some real possibilities.

The first and most important one is that Sharon is going to have a primary in the Likud



party which he's now likely to win after he got all this stroking from President Bush, and that's going to break one of the most important belief systems of the settler community. They have a seemingly immutable faith that history is theirs, that the future is theirs, that time is moving in their direction. That not only gave the small number of zealots strength, but it gave all of their supporters, even those who were less intense in the belief that they were in some way the Israeli pioneers come back. I think this will be over after the Likud primary. If the Likud votes to withdraw from territory, the zealots no longer could have that feeling, and that opens up tremendous play in the Israeli body politic.

Secondly, if you really read the exchange of letters closely there's less there than initially meets the eye. It's true that Bush said, you should recognize the demographic realities in relation to the 1949 armistice line. Now, Sharon took that to mean, I can keep the major settlement blocs. But, if you read carefully the exchange of notes, Bush didn't really say that. Furthermore, one must remember that demographic realities include the demographic reality of population growth in the Arab sector and the growing Arab sector in parts of East Jerusalem. Also, recourse to the 1949 boundaries rather than the 1967 borders actually puts a whole range of areas into play. If you consider the Green Line which is the 1967 borders, there are many areas near the borders of Israel that were considered a "no man's land" or an armistice zone in the 1949 armistice agreement. A close reading of the text might actually place those areas "in play."

Further, I think you have to look at the side letters, which haven't been written yet. I don't know what's in them, but I think the interesting point will be how much settlement growth Bush allows. Admittedly, there is language on the right of return that is very difficult for the Palestinians, in that it takes away what they see as symbolically a major negotiating tool. But, again, if you're looking at reality, even the Geneva accord and all the other proposals have really ended up at the end of the day with an arrangement that will put the bulk of any return in the Palestinian areas, not in Israel.

A third point: as of the date of the Likud primary, Sharon becomes a transitional figure. Either he's going to be indicted, or he's going to win the upcoming primary, and his government's going to fall, and he's going to have to take in the Labor party. Or he's going to take in the Labor party and then the government's going to continue until the winter, and there will be a kind of a Labor-Shinui government. Or he will lose the primary and the government will fall. Or he'll survive very weakened, not able to do very much. So we see tremendous ferment and opportunity in Israeli politics. Whether the peace camp will be able to do something about it, that's another story. But that's not something you can expect Sharon to worry about.

It's absolutely clear that both Sharon and Bush "dissed" the Palestinians. They totally ignored them. They negotiated between themselves and took away two big, symbolic bargaining chips, although, again, at the end of the day those chips were more chips of symbol than of substance. But, notwithstanding the fact that the impulse for this effort was unilateral, there is still an appreciation that it is going to require working with the Palestinians to actually pull it off (although for political reasons Sharon has never stressed this fact). Sharon clearly believes that, after his agreement with Bush, he can now approach the Palestinians from a position of greater strength. But in order to maintain a



modicum of stability in Gaza and the West Bank, if this unilateralist impulse is to succeed, he is going to have to move now into some kind of negotiation with the Palestinians – whether he calls it that or not. A lot depends on how the Palestinians react to this and on the openings and potentialities that are developing in the Israeli political process.

All in all, I think Geneva was a great concept, as something to have out there to think about. People who thought it was going to succeed were fooling themselves. Further, I believe that the withdrawal from Gaza and the small withdrawal from the West Bank – whatever Sharon plans – is going to be a beginning. There is a cunning logic to history – not only Hegel teaches us this, but reality, as well. The man who perhaps did the most to actually implement the settler movement is going to be the person, whether he understands it or not, who is going to take the actions that are going to begin to cause it to wither away.

AMB. FREEMAN: I appreciate that you, like Ziad, urge us not to write off hope for peace, or a settlement of these issues, but rather to build on the realities, the opportunities, that a withdrawal from Gaza may present. There is a certain dilemma that you point to: that because there is no trust, you cannot define the end state, the final status. But I think if you were to speak to Palestinians, you would find that culturally what they require is a definition of final status in order to proceed with the process. So there's a dilemma. On the one hand, you can't define it because there is no trust; on the other hand, because there is no trust, you can't leave it unsettled and still have a process. I don't know how we square this circle. Ziad suggested that it was time on the Palestinian side for a reaffirmation of leadership, some electoral process that would empower people to discuss what they do not now feel entitled to discuss, and that may be part of the solution.

It's ironic: a year ago we gathered to discuss the question of whether a unilateral withdrawal was the only viable approach for Israel and peace in this region. Rather to my surprise, all four panelists – and we thought we had selected some people who would argue for a unilateral withdrawal – argued against it, for a very cogent reason: that without Palestinian agreement there can be no resolution of this issue, and it will simply continue in one form or another. That's what I heard you say at the end, and I think that conclusion remains valid, notwithstanding whatever it was that was agreed to yesterday. As you've indicated, there's a lot of fine print that has yet to be written.

MILTON VIORST, author of *What Shall I do with this People? Jews and the Fractious Politics of Judaism*

I came rather late to this panel so you'll be tolerant, I hope, if I'm a little disorganized, to say nothing of having awakened this morning to this new, rather sensational change in America's Middle East policy – or perhaps not a change, maybe just a major new step in the direction in which it's been going since this administration has come into power. It makes the Geneva accord – which I agree with Marshall was never a central aspect in American thinking, much less in the peacemaking process – into something even more academic.

It's important to notice the difference between the two negotiating teams of the Geneva accord. The Israeli team was composed of peaceniks who were totally on the



outside; they had no relationship with the Israeli government at all and were considered opponents by the government. The Palestinian negotiating team, on the other hand, was very closely associated with the Palestinian Authority, with Arafat. It's true that Arafat very carefully detached himself from the conclusions, though he said a few very nice things about them, while indicating that this was not the word of the Palestinian Authority. Nonetheless, it was a group that was within the Palestinian establishment, and there was an effort made to convey the idea, if not all of the details, that this was an agreement with which the Palestinian Authority felt rather comfortable.

I just want to cite a couple of points, largely to come to the same conclusion that Marshall does, which I think is the crucial conclusion about democracy. It's not that the Geneva accord is spectacularly different from what President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon said in their exchange of letters this morning. They were remarkably alike, in that all sides have recognized the likelihood that four million, or whatever number of refugees we finally agree upon, will never return to Israel proper. They will return, if they choose to return at all, to the new Palestinian state. The fact that President Bush and Sharon have said this is in itself not terribly significant.

There is one difference from the Clinton plan that was developed over the course of the years of negotiation. Unfortunately, we can see in retrospect, these negotiations were tardy in terms of the eight years that Clinton served as well as, perhaps more important, they were disturbed by a few of the missteps of the Clinton era. The negotiators never really got to put their collective shoulder to many of these ideas to develop them fully. But the Clinton plans did have a concept of compensation for the Palestinians, of which the United States would be the central contributor, and we were going to take the lead in making sure that Palestinians would get some money for what they lost in terms of property and suffering. That is totally absent from what President Bush has talked about with Sharon.

Another notion that was central to the Geneva accord is the idea that somehow – and this was unspecified – the Palestinian state would receive equal territorial compensation for any settlements that were turned over to Israel in land that is now in Israel. It's unclear where that land might have been. Chances are it would have been out in the Negev desert. But, more important, it would have availed the Palestinians some sense of self-respect. They would get something from the negotiations; somebody wasn't slapping down a conclusion upon them, which of course is the framework of the Sharon-Bush exchange.

We've forgotten a lot of things, among which is that Geneva was somehow more or less conducted within the context of the Saudi plan. We don't hear very much talk about it because it was peremptorily dismissed by President Bush and the administration. But the Saudis did make very clear that they would recognize Israel and change from a war footing to a peacetime footing with the Israelis if there was a peace agreement with the Palestinians. And I emphasize the word peace agreement, not a peace imposition. The Saudis even brought their plan to the Arab League in Lebanon, and – lo and behold – it was approved by the Arab League unanimously; not without considerable grumbling, but it was approved. We don't know how that would have played out, but it was an element in the peacemaking process that our government chose totally to ignore. We simply dismissed it.



It's worth also recalling that among the luminaries who were at the signing of the Geneva accord was Secretary of State Powell. His presence said something about there being elements within our government that understand the folly on which we have embarked. But Secretary Powell, I need not tell you, is the odd man out in this government, not only on the question of Israeli-Palestinian relations but also on the whole question of Iraq.

We might remember what happened under President Carter during the Sadat-Begin negotiations, after Sadat went to Jerusalem in 1977 and made the fine statement that he would only make a peace agreement that took Palestinian interests into account. Yet, at Camp David under President Carter, the Palestinians were forgotten. This probably was no surprise, but the most important thing was that the Palestinians were outraged at the presumption of the Egyptians to speak for them, while serving their own and not Palestinian interests at all. That's exactly what's happening today. We're at a point where two powers, the United States and Israel, are presuming to determine the fate of the Palestinians. To use the words that Chas. used a couple of minutes ago, that's the denial of democracy to the Palestinians, the very cause that we are presumably fighting for in Iraq – at least, so we are told by our president.

Sure, Sharon is happy with the exchange of letters that took place. *The New York Times* has a rather extended story this morning about how the exchange is a function of American politics. Of course, it's a function of Israeli politics too. It's designed to save Sharon's office within the context of Israeli politics. He's in a lot of trouble with a possible indictment and the possible loss of his own party's support.

But beyond that, I wonder what the president thinks he is achieving, because one of the bizarre things is that he has taken a step within the context of the war on terror that no president has ever taken. At a time when we are attempting to reach some sort of a rapprochement with the Islamic world in order to dampen the fires of extremism, he has done something that no president chose to do even during the Cold War, when it might have made some strategic sense at least to issue a statement that allied us unilaterally and unequivocally with Israel. It might have made sense in challenging the Soviet Union at the time and challenging those Arab states that were our declared enemies – remember that Syria and Egypt were allies, at that point, of the Soviet Union. We didn't choose to do it then, and we're choosing to do it now – one of the many paradoxes of this administration.

I am one of the few people who has been arguing rather consistently that we can't understand the Bush administration unless we understand the president's devotion to religious doctrines having to do with the Middle East, in general, and with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular. I've been studying it, and I've written about it. It's very difficult for most of us to grasp because most of us are secular people. We find it hard to understand the influence of religion among politicians today, but I think that for President Bush, if theology is not the only brick that stands in the foundational wall of his thinking, it certainly is one of the major ones.

The religious school of born-again Christians to which he belongs maintains that it is important for the Jews to hold power in Israel, and I think that for the president, there is at least a major segment of his mind which shares that view. I say this almost by default, because what he did today and what he has been doing is only a continuation of a policy



that he has followed since the very beginning of his administration three and some years ago. I say “almost by default” because his policy doesn’t otherwise make sense in the context of the national interest. We are fighting this war on terror. We are seeking to ingratiate ourselves with the Islamic world. We are doing our best to show that we are even-handed in dealing with the Middle East conflict, and yet what he seems to be doing is igniting more and more bombs himself to explode among the very people whose support we need in order to win the war on terrorism.

I have spent most of my adult life trying to figure out the sources of American policy in the Middle East, and I’m probably as confused now as I was at the beginning. We have to keep looking for some explanation of this because it is so far removed from what I think will be useful to the interests of the United States.

AMB. FREEMAN: We did impose very late on Milton to join us, but I think we made a very wise choice. That very cogent statement is a product of years of reflection by Milton, and I think we’re all the better for it. I particularly appreciated his closing remarks because they’re about precisely what concerns me the most. I think one should be at least as careful – perhaps more careful – in the enemies one chooses as in the friends that one chooses, and we seem to be choosing some quite dangerous enemies at the moment.

I have one observation to make on the right of return, to which all three panelists so far have spoken. It is a theory that I put out to be refuted, and that is that the right of return has never been about Palestinians going back to Jaffa or other places in Israel proper. It has always been about symbolic recognition that a wrong was done to the Palestinians in 1948. In that sense, the need to address this is much like the need that Sadat recognized when he went to Jerusalem, to recognize the suffering that the Jewish people had gone through, which resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel. I think the Palestinians are calling for similar recognition of their suffering in a context where, unfortunately, there seems to be a contest to see who can suffer the most and the most painfully.

PHILIP C. WILCOX, JR., president, The Foundation for Middle East Peace

The day after President Bush’s endorsement of Sharon’s unilateral disengagement plan, it’s pretty clear that the Geneva accord is moribund and that it can’t be resurrected until Bush and Sharon leave office or stop singing in unison. Sharon’s intention to withdraw from Gaza is surely welcome in itself. But his unilateral approach, his rejection of negotiations, and his expressed willingness to evacuate only four small West Bank settlements, plus the massive separation barrier he is building that is creating serious new facts on the ground out of steel and concrete, reveal a deeper and dangerous overall strategy. Sharon says the barrier is temporary, but it more likely defines his vision of an eventual Palestinian state: a truncated series of noncontiguous enclaves in about half the West Bank that could not possibly become a viable Palestinian state.

Two days ago, Sharon seemed to confirm this by pledging that the major five big settlement blocs currently protected by the line of the wall, as it has been built and is planned, would be preserved. Sharon justifies his unilateralism by the claim that there is no Palestinian partner. But I think his real strategy is to avoid negotiations, which would



confront him with a need to address Palestinian claims. Sharon has a history of unilateralism, and, true to form, he continues to do it his way.

By endorsing Sharon's unilateral approach, Bush implicitly and, judging from former comments, explicitly supports Sharon's claim that there can be no negotiations until the Palestinians first stamp out terrorism. Now, I know very few people who really believe that Arafat or any other Palestinian leader will have the political or operational wherewithal to stop the violence without a political process that turns Palestinian public opinion against violence by promising an end to the occupation.

Bush described Sharon's plan as a "historic and courageous" move toward peace. But if Sharon's past is a guide, it looks more like a victor's peace that can only reinforce the cynicism and despair and rebellion of the Palestinians. Bush still clings to the Roadmap, which contemplates negotiations and a series of reciprocal obligations. It calls for an end to Palestinian terrorism, but it also calls for a settlement freeze, an evacuation of outposts, and an Israeli military pullback. Sharon has ignored Israel's Roadmap obligations, and Bush seems to have acquiesced.

Bush also accommodated Sharon by his startling declaration that the '49 armistice line is no longer realistic because of new realities on the ground, giving American support to settlements for the first time in history, and by calling for a resettlement of refugees in the new state of Palestine. Adopting these positions, to be sure, reflects reality – such conclusions will be the part of any ultimate peace agreement – but they're still a major departure from American policy, which has always held that such major issues must be resolved in the process of negotiations. These gifts to Sharon boost his political position at home and strengthen his resolve to impose unilateral results on the Palestinians, further undermining the prospect for a return to negotiations. This certainly does not advance American interests.

The current Israeli and American policy leaves no room whatsoever for a different approach like the Geneva accords. Nevertheless, if current Israeli and American policies give way to reality, as is likely in the future, somehow an approach along the lines of Geneva will have to be revised. How can this be done?

Today Israelis are not prepared to abandon the occupied territories and withdraw from settlements or take down the wall unless they can be assured that peace is possible, that they will be secure, and that they can preserve their Jewish state. Terrorism has so thoroughly frightened the Israelis that they're deeply skeptical about peace. And Palestinians will not turn against violence or abandon the right of return – which I think is primarily a bargaining lever – without a realistic hope of liberation in a genuine state of their own. I fear that Sharon's unilateral plan and Washington's warm support for it will only deepen Palestinian despair and weaken what remains of the secular, pragmatic Palestinian leadership.

Therefore, this impasse cannot be broken, and violence will remain the default choice of both sides unless somehow real hope for peace is restored. This is going to require a new vision of the future, spelled out in compelling detail that meets the basic needs of both societies: for Israel, peace and security in a Jewish state; for Palestinians, freedom and a genuine sovereign state of their own. Sharon's plan offers neither. It threatens the very



concept of two states, the outcome that is vital to preserve Israel as a Jewish, democratic state and to bring justice to the Palestinians.

In contrast, Geneva offers a vision of hope. It sets forth solutions to all the tough problems. Moreover, it's an Israeli-Palestinian product. Polls show that both sides support the elements of Geneva, yet they do not support the accord itself. The authors had hoped that it would galvanize politics and create a kind of groundswell that would oblige their leaders to adopt it or step aside. This has not happened. Indeed, the initiative has been waning and now seems moribund.

There is an alternative scenario, certainly not now but in the future. Somehow there might be a radical new American initiative to resume negotiations aimed at a peace along the lines of the Geneva accord, although we might call it something else. Such a plan would carry with it the moral and political authority of the United States, and it would be backed up by the appointment of a powerful American envoy. An American plan like this, if it were pursued with skill, determination and empathy toward both sides, could mobilize, over time, Palestinian and Israeli majorities in support. If such support could be mobilized, in the end this would oblige Arafat and Sharon, or their successors, to accept it or to yield to new leadership.

The United States could not and should not try to impose such a solution, any more than Sharon can impose a unilateral solution. It could only happen with the full support of both communities and a commitment by both to negotiations defined by an outcome that spells out clearly, as Geneva does, a promising vision of the future with a well-defined destination for the negotiations. Such a destination is necessary, or negotiations would fail again, as they have in a succession of "peace processes" that foundered in the absence of any defined endgame.

If this doesn't happen, I fear that both Israel and Palestine are going to descend further into violence and chaos. But I am convinced that both communities are desperate for a way out. The Geneva accord offers this. It is the culmination of ten years of public, official and private negotiation. It is fair and balanced. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that there can be any other ultimate solution that brings a lasting peace and meets the fundamental needs of both peoples. But it is still a distant vision. Until enlightened leaders emerge in Israel and in Palestine, or until the United States reverses its course and commits its full moral and political authority to such a real solution, I see little hope that this tragic conflict is going to end.

So, yes, the Geneva accord is dead for now, but "long live the Geneva accord."

AMB. FREEMAN: I think there is something approaching a consensus in the panel that unilateralism by Israel is not a viable long-term solution. In fact, one has to raise the question of how Israel is to become part of the Middle East if it continues to ignore not only the views of Palestinians but those of its other neighbors and to proceed unilaterally. Can the structures of peace that were built through negotiation earlier – the Camp David accords, the peace with Jordan – survive unilateralism?

Those accords envisaged progress between Israelis and Palestinians. That was the explicitly stated sine qua non, and of course, such an agreement between Palestinians and



Israelis was the trigger for the Saudi plan, which the Arab League, as Milton noted, endorsed after some grumbling. The Saudi plan, as far as I know, is still on the table. One wonders how long it will remain there if there is no peace process.

So I think everyone, in one way or another, notes that while that the Geneva accords themselves are very likely of little relevance to the current situation, nevertheless they stand as a symbol of hope for some future resumption of dialogue and accommodation between Israelis and Palestinians. That in itself is no mean achievement, even if, as many pointed out, the Israeli partners in this process are not at the center of Israeli politics, whereas the Palestinians may be somewhat closer to the center of Palestinian politics.

Q&A

Q: How significant is the passage of time? We're looking at 1948 to 2004, basically. Second, in regard to the Cold War stance from which this administration seems to be speaking, is it the case that this president is being advised by the wrong people and that he's being advised to do something that is no longer relevant in today's world? Third, how much arrogance can the rest of the world absorb from positions taken by the United States and Israel?

MR. VIORST: The passage of time is a source of great despair. We all thought at least by the time Yitzhak Rabin was elected prime minister that we were on the way, by virtue of some inevitable process – and I emphasize the delusion of the word inevitable – but it got turned around.

If I may be permitted to cite it, this review of my book that's in the current issue of *Middle East Policy*. I am usually wildly denounced by people as a crazy peacenik leftist or something of that sort, and in this review I am denounced as somebody who is living in an unreal world in which I think a two-state solution actually might work. The author of this review is a very distinguished professor, who wrote with considerable critical wisdom. He said, "Listen, we've already lost, those of us who felt that there was once the prospect for a democratic Palestine and a democratic Israel living side by side. Forget it; it's over." I tend to think that, alas, maybe it is over. Certainly President Bush has hammered a very big nail into the coffin.

I don't know whether the process can rise again. I'm feeling very despairing about it. I think it's important to note that the presumed Democratic candidate has not said anything terribly critical about the exchange of letters between Sharon and Bush. That may be understandable as a campaign position, but I think it's important to note, as the newspapers all did, that this was, once again, an extremely radical departure on the part of this administration, and I don't know if it can be undone.

Yes, the passage of time has been costly. Some premises that we began with – among them that peace could be attained only gradually, and we couldn't specify the end game, because only by leaving the crucial issues vague will we get cooperation – have proven invalid. The fact is, it was the other way around. Every time we came to a crossroads in this long process, there were people on both sides who were determined to wreck it, and in time they succeeded. They have certainly succeeded now. There is no peace process at all.



AMB. FREEMAN: I don't think it's fair or accurate to accuse the administration of taking a Cold War stance. The Cold War was characterized by a large measure of American deference to foreign opinion. It was conducted with allies whom we consulted before we acted, and it involved championing the rule of law against the lawless aggression of the Soviet bloc. I wouldn't say that the administration's position vis-à-vis the opinion of humankind, alliances or the rule of law internationally much resembles those earlier stands.

MR. BREGER: The passage of time is a major point. I am not sure if the Palestinians over time have gotten used to being occupied, but certainly Israelis have gotten used to being occupiers. That's one of the great tragedies of the "three no's" of Khartoum in 1967, when the Arab League basically refused to negotiate with Israel after the '67 war. It gave a chance for the Israelis to get comfortable with occupation.

But I think the passage of time is important. It's created the demographic "crisis," where the Israelis are now starting to recognize that, from a demographic point of view, in a few years there may not be a Jewish majority between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. I think that this as much as anything else is impelling Sharon to undertake withdrawal from Gaza. It has also created the demographic realities that President Bush alludes to in his letter to Sharon regarding settlements within the West Bank, which is that facts on the ground are a result of the passage of time. There's no doubt that the passage of time has made resolving this entire problem much more difficult and problematic.

I don't know if I would quite use the word "arrogance," although I understand the impulse behind it in referring to the Bush and Sharon agreement. It depends upon who's using the term. I have to be very frank: when you're the world's only superpower, the world is going to defer to you a great deal. If that means "arrogance," so be it.

DR. ASALI: I think what has happened the last couple of days is that both Bush and Sharon have actually punted. There is no finishing this game at this point in time. Nobody expects realistically that this package is the final one that will bring about peace. This is deferring peace for the future. The people who are opposed to peace at this point, the people who are opposed to the Geneva accord, the solution that gives us the final historic compromise, are betting on the future.

In Israel, the people who want to hold on to the land of historic Israel for religious or other reasons think that it is a very bad thing for them to have a deal now because it will mean precisely a two-state solution in which they will have to cede the land. On the other hand, the Islamic rejectionists will not want a peace solution at this time and are betting on the future. They think in the long run – 100 years – that they will throw Israel out.

So the question is between these visionary people with their ideological/religious mix of things, who think that in the final analysis things will work out their way or not. It is precisely the challenge for those of us who suffer less from these historical delusions and religious ideas to find a solution at this time for this generation that cannot but be a two-state solution with whatever is spelled out in Geneva as the final outcome. The problem with this is that we do not really have the political force to bring this about. No one in authority does.

MR. BREGER: It may be ironic, but I have to disagree with my colleague. At least on the



Israeli side, the groups that oppose a two-state solution are the groups that are radically opposed to the Bush-Sharon exchange of letters, who are opposed to the Gaza withdrawal, because they recognize that after this Likud primary, which is going to be held in a month – which Sharon is most likely to win because of this gift, as Phil put it, from Bush – the dream of greater Israel is broken. It's simply then a question of bargaining, of handling the details. But it's a major kind of existential change in the political realities. So the people who are against the two-state solution are the people who are against the unilateral Gaza withdrawal as envisioned by Sharon.

MR. WILCOX: The passage of time is critical, and the window for a compromise that would create two states is growing smaller. As one drives through the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as I did last month, the physical changes on the ground that Sharon and the settler movement have wrought, and the wall, are simply breathtaking. Because of these physical changes that were designed to be irreversible, it is conceivable that at some stage, watching this happen, the Palestinians will abandon hope for a two-state solution and revert to the old demand for one state: a binational, secular, democratic state in Palestine. Given their growing demographic advantage over the Jews, this would foretell a grim future for a Jewish and democratic state in Israel.

I am not at all sure that the Palestinians will persist forever in pressing for a state of their own in the West Bank and Gaza and a capital in East Jerusalem if there isn't a restoration of hope that that is possible. The facts on the ground offer vivid evidence that it is becoming less and less possible.

As for what motivates American policy, our politicians, the president included, have long pledged our steadfast support for the well-being and security of the state of Israel. If we are indeed committed to Israel's security, we should not indulge their leaders in self-destructive policies. We should embrace them and their fundamental needs and rights for a democratic Jewish state of their own, but we should look for different allies in Israel. It's a volatile country. There is a silent majority there that wants peace. Those people are our allies, not Sharon; those who are pursuing a policy in Israeli, American and, needless to say, Palestinian interests.

AMB. FREEMAN: In a sense, the passage-of-time issue began as an existential question in what is now the territory of Israel proper. It continued to be an existential issue, as people mentioned, certainly through 1967 and up to 1973. What happened after the war for Kuwait and the Madrid process, however, took this question and made it a non-existential question. In fact, Palestinians and Israelis during that time – and certainly the Arab world as the Abdullah/Saudi plan shows – came to accept the existence of the state of Israel and not to question it.

What Ziad is saying about Islamic extremists is very telling in that regard. Just as Jewish extremists now seek, in effect, a one-state solution, the Islamic extremists seek the same thing on their side. I don't think they have a vision, Phil, of a democratic, secular state in the land of Israel. And their model is not a hundred years. It is the Christian reconquest of Spain, which took 800 years and resulted in 1492 in the unthinkable: the expulsion of that brilliant civilization, both its Muslim and Jewish components, and the Diaspora of both throughout the entire European and Mediterranean region.



So both sides are indeed playing games with time, and the extremists on both sides have rather apocalyptic visions of how the passage of time might benefit their vision, which has no room for the other side.

DR. ASALI: May I just say that the other model for that period of time would be the Crusades. That's what they're talking about, the hundred or 200 years.

Q: Is the Sharon withdrawal from Gaza going to be interpreted in the region as a victory for terrorism or terrorist tactics against the state of Israel? Second, what is the connection between that withdrawal and the pressure that the U.S. occupation in Iraq is now under in the eyes of the people in the region? That, in turn, raises issues more broadly about stability in the region, including that of the state of Jordan.

DR. ASALI: Certainly, there are those who will want to claim that the withdrawal from Gaza is based on the Lebanese model with the fight of Hezbollah and now Hamas and the others having successfully made life very difficult for Israel, so Sharon is declaring victory and cutting out of Gaza. This is one spin, which may or may not succeed, depending on how it actually unfolds over the next several months and how the other forces that are equally anxious to reclaim the space, a secular democratic new order in Gaza, as a promise for the emerging Palestinian state will position themselves vis-à-vis Israel and the United States.

On Iraq, there is no doubt whatsoever that the Iraqi question is affected strongly by anything that's Palestinian. Palestine, for the Arab and Muslim masses, is a question that's very much like the Holocaust is to the Jews all over the world. This is something that's quite often ignored; people deflect the centrality of the Palestinian problem from analyzing anything that has to do with Israel and the Middle East. That is a mistake. I think the Iraqi people, even in their present misery, et cetera, et cetera, are extremely motivated by this question of Palestine, and the question is, will these secular democratic forces win or will the religious and uncompromising forces win? That will have a great impact on what's happening in Palestine.

On the Jordan question, there is an interesting scenario that is being talked about low key: Gaza, in one form or another, will fall under the domain of Egypt as it was prior to '67. Jordan, with the new barrier that is being built, will have a closer affiliation with whatever is left of the West Bank, and in time the Palestinians might decide that there is no viable solution for them, and after the noise that they will make, presumably somebody thinks or wishes that they would look to Jordan to join forces as a state of Palestine, a state of Jordan with a federal government. That is, I think, much more in the wishful-thinking domain. I do not believe that a viable Palestinian state can be avoided in the future if people are serious about peace.

MR. WILCOX: I'd like to take issue with the speaker's comment that Jordan is an artificial entity. One could argue that most of the post-colonial states in the Middle East are artificial entities, but they have, in varying degrees, become permanent entities. Jordan especially has displayed a level of statecraft, pragmatism and concern toward its own people that has given Jordan substance and continuity. It is, in my view, one of the more successful of the states of the modern Arab Middle East.



I always thought that the old Likud view that “Jordan is Palestine” was a dangerous fantasy. To invite a much larger Palestinian state on its eastern border that would maintain irredentist claims should have been seen as strategic folly from the Israeli point of view. Moreover, I don’t think the Palestinians want to become part of Jordan, and surely the kingdom of Jordan is not going to welcome a much larger and potentially destabilizing cohort of Palestinians.

MR. VIORST: The question is, is this an Israeli retreat? I think it is. I don’t believe the issue is so much giving up the territory, which is very important – and I join with those who applaud withdrawal from Gaza. The question is, how is it done? What purpose does it serve? And that’s why I’m a little bit bewildered by why Sharon is doing this. If it were done by negotiations, presumably he could elicit from the Palestinians some sorts of guarantees on security or whatever else he’s interested in. I think it’s curious.

So I must conclude that this is a grievous mistake in the unilateral way the retreat is being conducted. The Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world will see it as they saw the withdrawal from south Lebanon, as a triumph of terrorism or armed struggle or whatever you choose to call it. I think we have to recall how much this looks like what Sharon did by going into Lebanon originally in 1982. Unwilling to deal with the Palestinians as people, as a government, as a political force, he thought he was going to be able to go in there and impose his will by military force, and he failed. He is doing this now in Gaza and is getting support from an American president who thinks that the problems of the contemporary Middle East are only solved by military force, that politics and negotiation are not relevant considerations.

Forgive me if I point out that 20 years ago I wrote a book arguing that it was in Israel’s long-term interest to reach a territorial settlement with the Palestinians while it was still in a position of strategic superiority. But one of the problems with the Israelis is that when things are going calmly, when the region is not in a state of turmoil, the government says, why should we negotiate? Everything’s fine, there’s no problem now. Then as soon as the intifada began what we got was, we can’t afford to reward terrorism; it shows that terrorism will triumph. But in fact, I think in the case of both Gaza and Lebanon, terrorism has triumphed and the president, in effect, is recognizing it, notwithstanding that his consuming vision, the obsession of this administration, is terrorism and the rejection of any kind of political treatment of problems that obviously lend themselves to political solutions. Today Israel’s margin of strategic superiority is much narrower than it was 20 years ago. Today Sharon’s unilateral withdrawal is opening the door to increased instability in the region, and I think we’re probably going to see more instability over the course of the next few years.

MR. BREGER: I don’t know if it is correct that the proposed withdrawal from Gaza is a result of the “armed struggle” or not, but you’d be wise not to say it too loud. In the kind of zero-sum world we live in, a victory for the Palestinians is going to be seen a defeat for the Israelis, and therefore they’re not going to want to do it. I think there is no doubt that the Sharon disengagement proposal reflects the fact that the Israeli public, while in one sense resolute, is also despairing and looking for some way out of the present impasse. Also, the demographic reality that I referred to, while it has loomed large for many years,



only in the last six months to a year has the Israeli polity become really sensitive to it.

I agree with Phil that “Jordan is Palestine” is a fiction and nonstarter, but I also think that 50 years from now there will be a Palestinian state, however “viable,” that has some kind of connection with Jordan. Even if it has all of the land that was in the West Bank before 1967, the new Palestinian entity is ultimately going to be in some kind of economic, confederal relationship with some state, and I have to assume that, after their recent experience, it’s not going to be Israel. So I would have to imagine that after the flush of independence there would be a relationship developed with Jordan that would get closer over time – a confederal relationship perhaps, certainly an economic relationship.

MR. VIORST: Marshall said his concern was 50 years from now whether there’ll be a Palestine. My concern is whether there will be an Israel. There are something like 250 million Arabs and 4.5 to 5 million Israelis in the region, and that is a serious disparity. Israel has no strategic depth, besides the United States, but the Palestinians have this huge strategic depth behind them. Their conflict will not end simply by a proclamation on the part of the president and Sharon. What is done unilaterally and by declaration is far different from what is done by negotiation with the adversaries in which some mutual reconciliation is reached, however unhappy both sides might be over the outcome.

I think that is the serious mistake that we are involved in now. The imposition of an agreement, even if it contains some good elements, is not enough. Not requiring acknowledgement on the part of the other side of its virtues invites them to dwell totally on its deficiencies. The Palestinians may get Gaza back, and they’ll be very happy about this, but it’s not going to dispose them any more favorably to the Israelis because they did not participate in assembling a package that addressed a range of outstanding issues. Bush and Sharon addressed Israel’s concerns. There was no package.

AMB. FREEMAN: So, in effect, we come back to the security dilemma that intelligent Israelis have always recognized. It is better to make peace when you’re strong than to wait until you’re under pressure. I note in this regard that even the Roman Empire, which was vastly larger and more powerful than Israel, after applying Caligula’s foreign policy of “let them hate us as long as they fear us” was ultimately overwhelmed by less advanced tribal elements on its borders.

Q: If the withdrawal from Gaza is a retreat, in classic military terms it will be covered by a savage assault before the retreat or redeployment is actually done. What linkages might the rest of the world impose, given the problems we have in Iraq?

MR. VIORST: I was in Berlin a few weeks ago, and I was surprised to be invited to talk to a group of high-level German officials and journalists about why there were no countervailing forces in the world, most notably the EU. The EU is pulling itself together in so many ways – money and banking and passports and open borders, for example – yet, in terms of international politics, its impact is still negligible. Europe is certainly negligible on the Middle East, and the principal focus of the symposium was to ask why. It started with the recognition that power in the EU is still divided among Germany, France and England.

We know about Tony Blair. He has made a strategic decision on behalf of his country



that he will follow the United States and President Bush no matter what the magnitude of the disaster, and he is still there. The Germans, meanwhile, acknowledge that they have their hands tied by the fact that they're Germans, with a rather lousy history in terms of dealing with Jews. Their own history has cancelled them out as a force in dealing with the Middle East.

The former German chargé at the embassy in Israel said in the course of this conversation that at the time of the Geneva accords, Germany was absolutely thrilled, and the embassy issued a series of positive statements saying how pleased they were and that this opened up a door for the resolution of some problems. He said within 24 hours they began getting advisories from the Israeli Foreign Ministry saying, "Hey, come on guys, cool it. We have some serious concerns about the Geneva accords and we would rather that you Germans did not promote them." So he said, "Listen, we Germans had a consultation and we stopped promoting them."

That leaves France in Europe. The French in many ways have done a commendable job. But they're alone, and they're not very strong acting by themselves within the context of today's world. Italy and Spain, though rising in influence in the EU, simply do not have the habit of throwing their weight around on international questions. Russia is still too busy licking the wounds from its own transformation from communism a dozen years ago to exert real power, even if it wanted to, and I'm not sure it does. As for others – Japan or China – I can't imagine we can look to them as a counterbalance to American power.

The balance is so strange not just because the United States is strong, stronger than any country in history except perhaps the Roman Empire, but because the others are so weak – too weak to provide us with any significant amount of restraint or guidance. As we learned in Iraq, there is not much prospect out there for persuading us to change our course, however wrong or even self-destructive we might be.

DR. ASALI: Watching Europe over the past several decades one senses clearly the shift in the public's sentiment towards a much more sympathetic view of the Palestinians and on understanding their issues. Adding international terrorism now as a central issue for our time, I think there will be a stronger understanding of the role that this issue has in generating sympathy for people who would be causing international problems. But Europe, I agree, is still not exactly powerful and will not dictate.

There are still three major players. Two of them played yesterday, and one of them was left without the ball, but these three have to also undergo some changes. I think we have to watch for the elections in Palestine that I mentioned; there is no peace possible without an authorized Palestinian entity. The other is elections in this country. This issue will need to be part of the discussion during the elections. The third change will be within Israel. Somebody's already referred to the troubles of Mr. Sharon, where further developments will take place.

It is clear that Iraq is a problem and will remain so for several months to come. It was a bit strange that the president of the United States would downplay the sensibilities of the Arab Islamic world as he deals with an issue on which he needs to have a more sympathetic hearing to get a better resolution.

MR. BREGER: If your hope is that the rest of the world will influence the United States on



this point, I think you are whistling Dixie. I have to adopt Milton Viorst's view as regards the EU, although I would say that Britain has actually tried to use its close ally status on Iraq to try to influence the United States on the Arab-Israeli conflict. It hasn't gotten anywhere, which I think is the clearest sign that Europe doesn't have much purchase on this issue. Any European influence on the United States is going to be, in reality, in the details. For example, what is going to be included in the side letters related to allowable settlement growth and in any interim arrangements, or until there is, in Sharon's view or in the U.S. view, a Palestinian negotiating partner. Europe and the Arab world could also become involved in economic arrangements to assist the Palestinians.

AMB. FREEMAN: There are, in fact, increasingly unpleasant parallels between the dilemmas that the Israelis face in relation to the Palestinians and those we face with the Iraqis. Not only do the occupations increasingly resemble each other physically and on the television sets and before public opinion in the region, but our problem in Iraq has paralleled what several of the panelists spoke of – reaching out for a regime with which to negotiate. In attempting to accomplish regime change, we accomplished regime removal without change. We did not impose a new regime, and as we sought to remove the old regime we inadvertently destroyed the Iraqi state. Iraq, like the West Bank, is now in many respects a zone of anarchy under foreign occupation. There are no Iraqis who can speak for all Iraqis, and that is the problem that we confront as we approach June 30.

And there is a further parallel. We propose to transfer something called sovereignty to a group of Iraqis yet to be identified clearly. But sovereignty has as one of its main attributes a monopoly over the use of force in the territory where it applies. We're not transferring that to the Iraqis. General Abizaid will remain in control of the use of force in Iraq and will not be taking his orders from Ahmed Chalabi or whoever it is who emerges as the head of the Iraqi civilian authority. So, many of the same problems of not having anyone with whom one can make peace, with which Ziad began his remarks, apply in Iraq.

I want to make a comment, since Marshall raised the issue and no one else addressed it, on the Arab world and Arab reaction to these developments. The principal issue increasingly in domestic politics throughout the Arab world is the identification of governments with the United States, while the people are adamantly opposed to American policies and unsympathetic to our views on the issue of the Palestinians and Israel. The statements that were made yesterday will confirm, in the minds of people in the region, that the United States is now completely identified with Mr. Sharon and his government. They're likely to raise the percentages of opposition to Arab governments by people on this issue from the 92- or 93-percent level to the 97- or 98-percent level.

This potentially exacerbates an existing crisis in U.S. relations with Arab governments – which are already struggling against widespread popular opposition – to find a basis for maintaining a cooperative relationship with the United States. How this comes out is uncertain because Arab governments have shown an ability over the years to ignore their own public opinion or to pacify it by sleight of hand. That may in fact get them through this, but I think we should note the aggravation of the existing strain in our relationships in the region and within the region between peoples and their governments that this is likely to produce.



Q: What would a successful American effort in Iraq do to the future of the state of Israel? Would there be some sort of competition between the interests of the United States and Israel over the wealth and resources of the Arab world, or would that relationship actually intensify between these two countries to divide the pie?

MR. WILCOX: I don't foresee U.S.-Israeli competition over the benefits of a transformed Iraq. The great benefit to Israel is that the defeat of Saddam Hussein removes a large potential adversary. That's not to say that a comparable regime with unsavory qualities might not emerge in the future if things do not go well for the Iraqis and the Americans and if the impasse continues in Israel and Palestine.

There's a tendency to see these two conflicts as intimately related but they're very different. The solution in one is not going to solve the other, as some of our political leadership had expected. They each have their own internal dynamic. But certainly American interests in the war against terrorism are deeply linked to change and peace in Israel and Palestine. As we attempt to gain support from the public and from the governments in the Arab and Muslim world, we'll have great difficulty doing that unless we can demonstrate a more credible policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

MR. BREGER: I think you're proposing a bit of a conspiracy theory here, suggesting that there's some kind of conscious or unconscious plan of Israel and the United States to divide up the spoils of Iraq. I don't think that's the case. It is true that if there is a stable Iraq, and if there is renewed movement in the Middle East peace process, there will be greater trade between Israel and the Arab countries. Already there's a not insignificant amount of trade between them, which people don't talk about, going through third parties or changing the bills of lading. There's no doubt that such trade will increase because it's mutually beneficial to both Israel and the Arab countries. But that would require regional stability, and part of regional stability would be renewed movement in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

DR. ASALI: I think Israel and many of its friends in the United States have been perceived to have been very strong supporters of the change of regime in Iraq and being actively involved with the changes that are taking place in Iraq, including normalization of economic relations, travel restrictions, etc. For a nation that has been for decades thinking in terms of Israel as an enemy of the Iraqi people and the Arab people, this adds to the list of complications for the United States – to understand that sense of antagonism that the people of Iraq have. The longer this thing goes on in a hostile and violent manner, you would expect that Israel also will be tied in with this antagonism that the United States is facing.

On the other hand, moving the ball forward on the Palestinian issue, in general, in a credible way will absolutely be a factor in having the United States be perceived more benignly by Iraqis, the Palestinian people and the Arabs in general. This could help out with the resolution of the Iraqi problem.

AMB. FREEMAN: I for one accept the sincerity of those who advised the president. Earlier, a questioner asked whether the president was not misadvised. I believe he has been misadvised by people who had their own views of the region and an agenda that they wished to impose there. They were sincerely concerned, in the case of Iraq, both



about weapons of mass destruction and about Saddam Hussein's regime and what he might do. I think those concerns were misplaced to a considerable extent, but they were real. Having said that, I think the architects of the Iraq invasion had other agendas. Some of them argued that Iraq, once subdued, would be a stepping stone to strategic pressure on other states in the region, including Iran (which many Israelis, frankly, would have preferred the United States to attack rather than Iraq). One saw this evidenced immediately after the occupation of Baghdad by all sorts of statements, not followed up later, against Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Then, there was the issue that Phil referred to: in effect, eliminating Iraq as a strategic contender or possible enemy of Israel was seen as a great plus. This was a big gamble, because we now do not know whether that is going to be the result of the occupation or whether Iraq may emerge as the catalyst for a widened Jihadi struggle against the United States and our friends. In fact, within Iraq, I believe Shia forces are now making common cause with Hezbollah and Sunni forces with Hamas and both with al Qaeda. Even secular nationalists are now working with al Qaeda – which is a group of religious fanatics – in ways which link the struggle against Israel with the struggle against the United States in new and very dangerous ways. So we don't know whether Iraq will be eliminated as an enemy or whether it will be a catalyst for a wider grouping of enemies.

Finally, I think those who advocated the invasion of Iraq were people who believed sincerely in the theory that democracies don't attack democracies. Therefore, if you could somehow democratize Iraq, since Israel is a democracy then Iraq would somehow have so much in common with Israel that it would no longer be a military threat. I've always been very dubious about this theory, which I don't think withstands scrutiny. It reminds me of the theories that we've seen before: that Christians don't fight Christians and Muslims don't fight Muslims, Arabs don't fight Arabs, Communists don't fight Communists and so forth and so on, all of which have unfortunately proven wrong.

So, I was very dubious about this, even if it were possible somehow to impose democracy on Iraq, which I think the evidence is beginning to suggest is not possible. That said, there is a growing linkage between the issues. It's really a result of the adventure in Iraq rather than a cause of it though, in my view.

MR. VIORST: Let me just point out that after Yitzhak Rabin became prime minister in the early 1990s, he genuinely tried to make peace. Rabin was not a saintly man, but he was a man who could and did learn. He started out as a very dedicated hawk and ended his life as an extremely cautious dove or perhaps a more reasonable hawk. Rabin said something in his inaugural address that I have always remembered. I'm sorry I can't recall it verbatim, but he said something to the effect that the times have changed for the Jews. We are no longer a beleaguered people. We are now accepted by much of the world and recognized, and we no longer need to conduct ourselves as if we are beleaguered, as we were for many hundreds, even thousands of years.

So I think it's important that Israel reach out to the world in precisely the way that Ambassador Freeman was talking about. Indeed, in those few brief halcyon moments of the Rabin peacemaking years, Israel not only made peace with Jordan but had, as I recall, diplomatic or at least commercial representation in much of the Arab world. But, after



Rabin's death, Israel reverted back to conducting its international affairs as if it were desperate, besieged. The message Sharon sends – unfortunately encouraged by the American president – is that all Israel's neighbors and much of the rest of the world hate Jews, wish only evil on Israel, and can be dealt with only by stubbornness and superior force. He is not interested in the good opinion of mankind (Jefferson's term) because he is suspicious of all mankind's designs on the Jews.

Sharon and his people are convinced it is a snare and a delusion for Israelis to believe they can ever live in harmony with the Arab world. The brief moment under Rabin, that brief shining moment when things were going well and everybody felt that inevitably the region would continue to move towards peace, was turned around completely and we are back where we started. And, of course, the Arab world has reciprocated with mistrust, psychologically as well as diplomatically, and its vision of Israel as a tolerable presence recedes further and further from its everyday reality.

AMB. FREEMAN: I think it's fair to say, wouldn't you agree, Milton, that the Israelis have been aided in coming to this unfortunate conclusion by the 872 deaths they have suffered over the last two-and-a-half years.

MR. VIORST: No question that the cause is mutual animosity. The strategy of mutual murder that both sides have adopted is the manifestation of these sentiments.

DR. ASALI: I don't think there are clean hands about this issue anywhere. Everybody's guilty, and when does history start? When does our list of grievances begin, and how you killed us and we killed you? This is precisely the kind of dialogue that cannot be sustained if we are serious about peace. Those people who are interested in peace should absolutely try and think more of the future than they do of the past. Learn from the past, but in order to build a future – and this is where we have a huge problem.

One of the problems about the withdrawal from Gaza alone and the discussions that have been taking place excluding the Palestinians is that it plays to their deepest fears. The deepest fear of the Palestinians is that they will end up without a state. The deepest fear of the Israelis now is that they're going to throw us into the sea. We have to deal with the deepest fears of both peoples and tell them we want you to stay in Israel and we want to have a Palestinian state. This is the challenge for people who are in charge and people who are not in charge in this world: to establish muscle behind this reassuring vision and make it happen.

The president made a statement a couple of days ago. He said Iraq is linked to the Middle East. I take it to mean that Iraq is linked to Palestine/Israel. Yes, it is linked, and it is the challenge for all of us to find a way out.

Q: Why do you think Mr. Bush ignores the importance of being even-handed and playing the honest broker to move forward on the Syrian and Lebanese track in the peace process. And do you think that the justification for the war is related to the demographic factor and not the psychological factor?

AMB. FREEMAN: With regard to the so-called fence.

MR. WILCOX: There are many factors that influence American policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict and toward the larger Middle East. I think we underestimate the positive influence and leadership that we can deploy. We tend to think of the people of that region



as somehow unruly, fanatic, backward. They're not; they're human beings, not all that different from us. Many of them admire American institutions and the United States. They don't like our policies, but we have enormous potential for moving public opinion in those countries in the right way. But none of those countries are going to move in the direction that we hope, including Israel and the Palestinian territories, unless public opinion supports this.

I think we need to address the people in the region more directly. We have seen in the past that public opinion in Israel and Palestine is very volatile, that it can change for the worse or for the better. It has certainly changed for the worse in part because of relentless and cynical propaganda and mythology. But we've also seen it change for the better. For example, in the early '90s the Likud government led by Yitzhak Shamir, which opposed a good faith, plausible, attractive American peace initiative, was voted out of office by the Israeli public. So let's think more about the public dimension of peace. Peace is not going to come through secret diplomacy. It's going to come, as Ziad said, through reassurance and empathy that tells the protagonists that we're with them, we're for peace, and that we have a proposal that's going to rescue them.

MR. BREGER: Your question about the Syrian situation is a very good one. I think it's clear that the times when the Syrians were quite interested, the Israelis pulled back and didn't show much interest. Then when the Israelis were quite interested, the Syrians didn't grasp the ring. Itamar Rabinovich has written on this. There is no doubt that in many ways it's easier to come to an agreement with Syria than with the Palestinians. It's always been a question mark for me of why there hasn't been more progress in that area. It's certainly true that there have been occasions when Israeli governments have thought that they could move forward with Syria and come to an agreement "at the expense of the Palestinians." Syria, I suspect, looked at the matter differently. So it's a bit of a mystery why there has not been more progress on the Syrian "track."

MR. VIORST: After many decades of looking at this whole thing, what I have concluded, not happily, is that we have here two peoples, both of them with seriously and understandably scarred psyches. Would one expect anything different from the Jewish people after the Crusades and the Inquisition and the Holocaust? And would one expect anything dramatically different from the Arabs after years of what they regard as domination and humiliation by the West? What we have here are two peoples whose capacity for wise political judgment is seriously impaired, and what's happening now is that the scars are getting deeper and rawer. What Abba Eban said with regard to the other side can be applied to both: neither side has missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

AMB. FREEMAN: In that vein, the one clear conclusion that I would draw on this issue is that the administration's initial analysis when it came in, which was that the United States could not be more in favor of peace than the parties to the dispute, sounded plausible but was disastrous. We should learn never to substitute the judgment of the parties for our own on matters where our interests are at stake, as they are in this. We should not have defaulted on the peace process as we did in 2001. That has brought many, many serious consequences. So there is a lesson here to be learned.

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