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Source: *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 116, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 171-199

Published by: The Academy of Political Science

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/798058>

Accessed: 20/01/2010 05:37

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What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

JEROME SLATER

With the election of Ariel Sharon and the Palestinian turn from revolution to terrorism, the Israeli-Palestinian “peace process,” which managed to go on for over ten years without producing peace, has degenerated into major violence. It is critically important that the reasons for this catastrophe be properly analyzed, for sooner or later there will be a resumption of negotiations, and the lessons of this failure must be understood.

Contrary to the prevailing view, Israel rather than the Palestinians bears the greater share of the responsibility, not only for the latest breakdown of the peace process but for the entire course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 1948. And U.S. economic and military assistance, along with America’s nearly unconditional political and diplomatic support of Israel, has enabled Israel to disregard the legitimate interests and demands for moral justice of the Palestinians, as well as the potential constraints of regional power and international opinion. Well-intentioned but unwise U.S. support of Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians has also enabled Israel to disregard its own best interests.

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: FROM 1948 TO OSLO, 1993

According to the conventional Israeli historical narrative, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the consequence of seventy-five years of mindless Arab hatred of the Jews and an Arab unwillingness to match the Jewish effort to reach a fair compromise over the ancient land of Palestine. The Palestinian conflict with the Zionists then escalated into a wider Arab-Israeli conflict when the Arabs rejected the 1947 United Nations partition plan, which provided for the division

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of Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs and the creation of the State of Israel. In a continuing spirit of compromise, the conventional history holds, the Zionist leadership accepted the UN plan, but the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab states rejected it and launched an unprovoked invasion designed to destroy the new Israeli state. In the course of the ensuing war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living within Israel's boundaries fled to the neighboring Arab states, ordered or urged to do so by the invading Arab armies; the Zionists, by contrast, had urged the Palestinians not to leave, for they sought to demonstrate that the Palestinians and Israelis could live side by side within a Jewish state.

After the 1948 war, the story continues, Israel remained willing to settle the conflict on the basis of compromise, but they could find no Palestinian or other Arab leaders with whom to negotiate. As Abba Eban famously put it, "The Arabs never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity." The refugee issue remained unresolved, largely because it suited the cynical purposes of the Arab states to keep it festering; the result was the creation of Palestinian guerrilla terrorism, aided by the neighboring Arab states, especially Egypt and Syria. This local and international terrorism led in turn to new Arab-Israeli wars in 1956, 1967, and 1973, all of them forced on Israel by Arab aggression.

This wall of monolithic Arab hostility was not breached, the narrative asserts, until Anwar Sadat of Egypt decided to make peace with Israel in the late 1970s, followed twenty years later by another Arab leader, King Hussein of Jordan. But even today the overall Arab-Israeli conflict continues, because neither the Palestinians nor the rest of the Arab states are willing to accept fair compromises.

So goes the conventional history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. No matter how sincerely and deeply held, historical narratives are not always accurate, and the mythology they create can have devastating consequences. The Israeli narrative significantly distorts and oversimplifies the historical reality. The unwillingness of most Israelis to reassess their mythology is the fundamental reason for the continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could even escalate into another general Arab-Israeli war. And the continued grip of the conventional mythology on the American Jewish community also contributes to the problem, because of the influence that community (of which, perhaps I should add, I am a member) has had on U.S. foreign policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In the past fifteen years, there has been a remarkable burst of historical scholarship, most of it by Israeli academicians and journalists, on the origins and dynamics of the Arab-Israel conflict. The Israeli "new history," as it has come to be known, has decisively refuted the conventional historiography and compelled a sweeping reassessment of the entire course of the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹ In its essentials, the revised history holds that the Palestinian-Israeli

¹ The new history is now so extensive that a complete citation of the major works is beyond the scope of this article. However, the most important and influential books are Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel* (New York: Pantheon, 1987); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*,

conflict is rooted not in mindless Arab anti-Semitism but in Zionism's insistence that a Jewish state must be created in Palestine, despite the fact that for over 1,300 years it had been overwhelmingly inhabited by Arabs, who in the twentieth century sought political independence in and sovereignty over their homeland. In Palestinian eyes, this history far outweighs the Jewish claim to Palestine, which is ultimately based on the biblical account in which God promised the land of Palestine to the Jews, who subsequently conquered, inhabited, and ruled that land until they in turn were conquered and expelled by the Roman Empire two thousand years ago.

To be sure, the Jewish claim to Palestine is also based on the British Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised a national homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people. However, the Balfour Declaration did not promise Jewish sovereignty over Palestine; and in any case, the Palestinians argue, it was simply a unilateral imposition of British colonialism, which ignored the wishes and political rights of the indigenous peoples.

Be that as it may, the rise of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust radically changed the moral equation, because it made the case for a Jewish state both urgent and irrefutable, and by then there was no other practicable site for such a state other than Palestine. Even so, argued the Palestinians, they were not responsible for the Holocaust and should not be made to pay the price for western anti-Semitism. In any case, when Britain began allowing Jewish immigration into Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, it met with violent Arab resistance and terrorism—which in turn engendered Jewish counterviolence and terrorism. This violence convinced the British and later the UN that Palestine had to be partitioned. As the new historians point out, however, the Arab rejection of this compromise was based not only on their insistence on 100 percent of their political rights, but also on their belief—which turned out to be correct—that the Zionist leadership would not be satisfied with or abide by a compromise.

The evidence is now irrefutable that David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, and the other leading Zionists "accepted" the UN compromise only as a necessary tactical step that would later be reversed, a base from which Israel would later expand to include all of biblical Palestine. In many private statements, Ben-Gurion was quite explicit, as in a 1937 letter to his son: "A partial Jewish state is not the end, but only the beginning. The establishment of such a Jewish state will serve as a means in our historical efforts to redeem the country in its entirety. . . . We shall organize a modern defense force . . . and then I am certain that we will not be prevented from settling in other parts of the country, either by mutual agreement with our Arab neighbors or by some

1947–51 (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992); Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

other means. . . . We will expel the Arabs and take their places . . . with the force at our disposal.”²

A year later, Ben-Gurion told a Zionist meeting: “I favor partition of the country because when we become a strong power after the establishment of the state, we will abolish partition and spread throughout all of Palestine.”³ And “Palestine,” as understood by the Zionists, included the West Bank, Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights, southern Lebanon, and much of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. After 1947, Ben-Gurion acted on this philosophy, both in the expulsion of the Palestinians and in Israeli expansionism, for in subsequent years the Israelis took advantage of wars to seize all of those areas.

In any case, the Zionist acceptance of the UN partition plan was limited to only part of the plan—the part that established the state of Israel. The other core element of the UN plan—and of every other serious compromise plan for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1947 to this moment—was the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside of Israel. Not only did the Zionists reject such a compromise, they worked actively to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state in 1948 and for the next fifty years. Despite the widespread misperception that Ehud Barak offered the Palestinians “generous” peace proposals at Camp David, Israel is still resisting the creation of a genuinely viable and independent Palestinian state.

THE EXPULSION OF THE PALESTINIANS

In the received mythology, Israel bears no responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem, for it is said to have been created entirely as a consequence of Palestinian rejectionism and the Arab invasion of 1948. No part of the historical mythology has been so devastatingly refuted by the Israeli new history as this. In fact, the expulsion of the Palestinians began well before the Arab invasion and continued after the Israeli victory, for it was a direct consequence of thirty years of private Zionist discussions about the necessity for “transferring” the Palestinians out of the country when the opportunity arose. Beginning in 1947, the Israeli army began implementing a detailed strategic plan (Plan D) for dealing with the Palestinians, especially but by no means exclusively those who were actively resisting the Israelis. The plan called for the “destruction of villages (setting fire to, blowing up, and planting mines in the debris), especially those population centers which are difficult to control continuously,” and “mounting [of] operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the village and . . . in the event of resistance . . . the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state.”⁴

² Quoted by Michael Bar-Zohar in his revealing biography of Ben-Gurion, *Facing a Cruel Mirror* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990).

³ Quoted in Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, 24

⁴ The full text of Plan D was published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18 (Autumn 1988). Many of the Israeli participants have provided details in memoirs or interviews, the best known of which was Yitzhak Rabin’s memoirs, in which he wrote that after he led an army unit into a Palestinian village

That's what was officially written down. In fact, there were many Israeli murders, political assassinations, and even wholesale massacres including women and children that went beyond the guidelines, some by so-called "uncontrollable" groups like the Irgun, but some even by regular Israeli army units. The general frame of mind was revealed in a memo of Ezra Dannin, the Israeli government adviser on Arab affairs: "If the High Command believes that by destruction, killing, and human suffering its aims will be achieved faster, then I would not stand in its way. If we don't hurry up, our enemies will do the same things to us."⁵ In the wake of the expulsions or the terrified flights of entire Palestinian villages who could see what fate might await them, the army moved in, either bulldozing the abandoned villages to the ground or housing incoming Jewish immigrants in them.

In short, there is now irrefutable evidence that most of the Palestinians who became refugees from Israel in the 1947–1949 period did so because they were either forcibly expelled or fled as a result of Israeli psychological warfare, economic pressures, artillery bombardments, terrorism, and massacres, all carried out, as one leading scholar has put it, "under a general umbrella of protection and encouragement from Ben-Gurion and other political leaders. . . ."⁶ The expulsion of the Palestinians created the refugee problem that festers to this day and led to the emergence of Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) movement in the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. When the PLO began crossborder guerrilla raids on Israel, the Israelis retaliated in massive fashion, and the ensuing vicious circle of conflict precipitated the 1956 Arab-Israeli Suez War, the 1967 War, and the Israeli invasions of Lebanon, especially in 1982.

It all might have been avoided had Israel genuinely sought to compromise with the Palestinians in 1947–1948. Had there been such a Zionist-Palestinian compromise and had Israel refrained from expelling the Palestinians, it is likely that there would have been no 1948 Arab state invasion of Israel and no subsequent overall Arab-Israeli conflict. But Israel didn't want to compromise with the Palestinians, let alone allow the creation of a Palestinian state in any part of "Greater Israel." What it sought to do was, in the Israeli vernacular, "to create facts on the ground" and to force the Palestinians out of their homeland—by whatever means necessary, and regardless of the long-term consequences of such behavior.

he asked Ben-Gurion: "What is to be done with the population?" Ben-Gurion responded with a "wave of his hand, in a gesture which clearly meant 'Drive them out.'" Israeli censors deleted this passage from the English translation of Rabin's memoirs, but it was revealed by the *New York Times*, 29 October 1979.

⁵ Dannin is quoted by David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983), 36. For further evidence of direct Israeli government complicity in the massacres, see Benny Morris, "Falsifying the Record," *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 24 (Spring 1995); and Tom Segev, "What Really Happened in the Conquest of Lod?" *Ha'aretz*, 12 May 2000.

⁶ Ian Lustick, *Israeli Studies Bulletin* 13 (Fall 1997): 17.

THE OSLO PROCESS

In the early years after its formation, Arafat's PLO was clearly maximalist: it insisted on the complete "liberation" of all of Palestine—meaning the destruction of Israel. However, as early as the late 1960s, this rejectionist position began giving way—albeit tentatively, ambiguously, and inconsistently—to a willingness to seek a two-state diplomatic solution with Israel. Nothing came of this, however, because Israel was not interested in exploring the emerging indications of Palestinian pragmatism, ignored all overtures, and refused even to talk with the PLO, let alone compromise with it.

Even more importantly, the Israeli Labor governments of the 1960s and 1970s, headed by Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Peres, began the process of creating Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, purposely placed in areas that would separate Palestinian cities and villages, so as to make impossible the creation of a viable, territorially contiguous Palestinian state.

Nonetheless, the PLO's position continued to evolve until in November 1988 it officially accepted a two-state solution of its conflict with Israel. Under the terms of the PLO commitment, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital, would agree to be largely demilitarized, would accept the stationing of international peacekeeping forces along its borders with Israel, would end terrorism and all forms of attack on Israel from its territory, would refrain from alliances with Arab rejectionist states, and in all probability would agree to a settlement of the refugee problem on the basis of a token return to Israel, combined with large-scale international economic compensation of the refugees and their resettlement in the Arab world.⁷

The first meaningful agreement between Israel and the PLO was the Oslo accords of September 1993, negotiated by Arafat and Prime Minister Rabin of Israel. The accords called for the mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO, and a five year transitional period under which Israel would gradually withdraw its troops and administrative structures from the major Palestinian population centers in favor of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the interim Palestinian government until an independent state was established. At the end of the transitional period, there would be a permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories conquered in 1967. In turn, Arafat promised to end anti-Israeli violence in the occupied territories and even to directly cooperate with Israeli security forces.

Although the Oslo accords did not quite specify that a permanent settlement must include the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, there was no doubt that this was the universal expectation of the Palestinians, the international community, and of both the Israeli government and public opin-

⁷ The official Palestinian position was articulated in detail in a number of ways. For a full discussion, see the historic article by Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), then the second-ranking PLO leader, "Lowering the Sword," *Foreign Policy* 78 (Spring 1990).

ion. The achilles heel of Oslo was that it postponed the most difficult issues—the borders of the Palestinian state, the Israeli settlements, the Jerusalem problem, the division of West Bank water, and the refugee issue—until the final settlement that was to have been negotiated by May 1999. Thus, the Israelis were not required to remove any settlements or even to stop their expansion and the building of new ones, both in the territories and in East Jerusalem. Even so, it was clear that continued settlement expansion would not only be inconsistent with the spirit of Oslo, it would nullify the end goal of Palestinian independence.

Arafat was severely criticized by many Palestinians for these gaping loopholes in the Oslo agreements, and in retrospect the critics were correct. Yet, because Israel held all the cards and Rabin refused to go any further, it is hard to see what options were available to Arafat, other than to hope that the Israeli position would continue to evolve over time, so long as he kept the peace within Palestinian-controlled areas. What perhaps could not be foreseen was the extent to which Rabin remained committed to a hardline position that in effect would prevent any truly viable independent Palestinian state from being created. In the next few years, in a variety of ways, Rabin and his successor Shimon Peres violated the spirit of Oslo and even the letter of a number of the agreements.

Two years after the Oslo agreements were signed, Rabin announced his detailed plans for a permanent settlement with the Palestinians: there would no return to the pre-1967 borders; a united Jerusalem, including the Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, would remain under exclusive Israeli sovereignty; most of the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza would remain there, under Israeli sovereignty; free access to and military control over the settlements would be assured by a series of new roads to be built throughout the territories; Israel's security border "in the broadest meaning of that term" would be the Jordan River, meaning that Israel would retain settlements and military bases in the Jordan River valley, deep inside Palestinian territory. What the Palestinians would get was an "entity" that would be the "home to most of the Palestinian residents living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. . . . We would like this to be . . . less than a state."⁸

In the next year, Rabin began implementing this peace plan, under which the Palestinians would end up with a series of isolated enclaves on less than 50 percent of the West Bank and Gaza, cut off from each other and surrounded by Israeli settlers and military bases. Jewish settlement in an ever-expanding Jerusalem continued, including in Arab areas, and the massive road building project got under way, often requiring the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian homes and orchards.

Astonishingly, under Rabin the growth of the Jewish settlements was greater than it had been under the previous hardline Likud government of Yitz-

⁸ Speech to Knesset of 5 October 1995, printed in *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories* 5 (November 1995).

hak Shamir. And even the most fanatical settlements, located in the heart of heavily Palestinian areas and presumably destined to be removed in a permanent agreement, were maintained. Rabin rejected the recommendation of his own cabinet to remove the small settlement in the Palestinian city of Hebron, following the massacre by a Jewish fanatic of twenty-seven Palestinians praying in a mosque.

Even the letter of the Oslo accords was often disregarded by the Rabin government: Palestinian prisoners that Israel had committed itself to release remained in jail; the promised Palestinian air field in Gaza was delayed; detailed provisions for free Palestinian passageway between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as free movement of people, vehicles, and goods within the territories, were often violated by Israeli closures that caused great personal and economic hardship; Palestinians living outside Jerusalem were often prevented from attending services at the Muslim mosques on the Temple Mount; Israel often did not comply with scheduled partial troop withdrawals; and tax and custom revenues that were to have been transferred by Israel to the Palestinian Authority were frequently held up.

Yet, throughout the Rabin period the PA complied with its obligation to do its best to end terrorism, perhaps excepting a brief period following the Hebron massacre. And it did so with great (though not total) success, as the Palestinian security forces under Arafat worked hand in hand with Israeli security forces, often in joint patrols, to identify and jail extremists and suspected terrorists, some of them from lists drawn up by the Israelis.

After Rabin's assassination and the accession of Shimon Peres, Israeli policy became even harder. There are indications that at the very end of his life, Rabin's position was softening, for his private and even some of his public statements showed far more empathy with the plight of the Palestinians. It was increasingly evident he had dropped his opposition to the creation of some kind of Palestinian state. Peres, though, stepped up the process of settlement expansion and road building and continued to oppose Palestinian statehood.⁹ In the spring of 1996, Peres authorized the assassination of a Palestinian activist accused of terrorism; in retaliation, Palestinian fundamentalists killed dozens of Israelis in a series of urban bombings. Following the bombings and a disastrous Israeli intervention in southern Lebanon, the largest since 1982, the Israeli public turned against Peres and elected Benjamin Netanyahu.

Under Netanyahu, after one further small Israeli withdrawal, the Oslo process effectively came to an end: by May 1999, when the transition process was

⁹ In March 1997, Yossi Beilin, one of Israel's leading doves and an adviser to Peres, said that whereas Rabin had envisaged a limited Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, Peres wanted Palestinian sovereignty to be limited to Gaza, with some kind of joint Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian rule over the West Bank. (Interview in *Ha'aretz*, 7 March 1997). Similarly, Yossi Sarid, head of Israel's moderate left Meretz political party, has said that Peres's plan for the West Bank was "little different from Ariel Sharon," and amounted to mere "cantonization." Quoted in Report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Israeli-Palestinian Security*, 1995.

supposed to have been completed, the Israeli occupation over most of the West Bank and Gaza was still in force, Netanyahu had reneged on any further troop withdrawals, the settlement process was continuing, Israel was tightening its grip on East Jerusalem, the road network was expanding, economic closures of the territories had become more draconic and more frequent, and Netanyahu refused to enter into the Oslo-required negotiations for a permanent settlement.¹⁰

BARAK AND THE PEACE PROCESS

By the time Ehud Barak took office in 1999, not only were Israel's actions nullifying the Oslo process, but they had also gravely undermined Arafat's position among the Palestinians, who were now in worse shape—politically, economically, and psychologically—than they had been when the agreements were signed in 1993. Even so, after the 1996 retaliatory bus bombings, the Palestinian Authority (working closely with Israeli security forces) successfully cracked down on terrorist groups and Islamic extremists; as a result, in 1999 there were only two Israeli civilians killed by Palestinian terrorism, the lowest since 1987.¹¹

Barak's performance in office was so strange that it does not seem an exaggeration to term it schizoid. It is true that at Camp David he went considerably further than any other Israeli prime minister in making concessions to the Palestinians. But not only did his proposals still fall considerably short of what was necessary to make peace, in both his rhetoric and his actions he continuously subverted his own peace plan and the rational analysis on which it was based. In several interviews, Barak has provided what is perhaps the best explanation for his behavior: he was seriously divided against himself. "Emotionally, I feel like a right-winger," he has admitted, "but in my head I'm realistic, pragmatic."¹² Until he came into office, Barak had long been a hardliner. As chief of staff of the Israeli armed forces in 1993, he had opposed the Oslo agreements, and throughout the 1990s his conception of a settlement with the Palestinians differed in no fundamental way from Netanyahu's or, for that matter, from Ariel Sharon's: if a Palestinian state became unavoidable, it would be allowed only in Gaza and about half the West Bank, with Israel continuing to exercise sovereignty and military control over the remainder, including the settlements, the Jordan Valley, all of Jerusalem, and most or all of the water aquifers.

Even after his election, Barak continued to reveal his ideological predispositions in his repeated references to the West Bank as "Judea and Samaria" and

¹⁰ In 1996, Ze'ev Schiff, Israel's leading centrist security analyst, wrote that "not one promise made to the Palestinians has been fulfilled" by Netanyahu, who also continuously subjected Arafat to "humiliation and degradation." *New York Times*, 30 August 1996.

¹¹ David Makovsky, "Middle East Peace Through Partition," *Foreign Affairs* 80 (March/April 2001): 38. According to the Israeli journalist Danny Rubinstein, as a result of Arafat's crackdown, "almost the entire military arm of Hamas has been eliminated, extremist Muslim activists were imprisoned, and the organizational infrastructure of the Islamic movements was seriously weakened." See *Ha'aretz*, 12 March 2001.

¹² Interview with Jeffrey Goldberg, "Arafat's Gift," *New Yorker*, 29 January 2001, 66.

his comment on “the struggle of the State of Israel to rule over Greater Israel”; in his constant denigration of the Israeli Left and his admission that he felt closer to the pro-settlement National Religious Party than to Meretz, the home of most of the Israeli peace camp; and his “warm personal greetings” to the most fanatical and violent of the Jewish settlers in Hebron.¹³

Moreover, Barak had a barely concealed contempt for the Arabs, an attitude that, together with his arrogance and authoritarian personality, undermined his direct negotiations with Arafat. “Israel is a villa in the middle of a jungle,” he often proclaimed, a “protective wall” for the West, a “vanguard of culture against barbarism.” According to him, it was “Arab culture” that prevented an agreement at Camp David: “It is because of the character of the Arab discourse that their culture does not contain the concept of compromise. Compromise is apparently a Western concept of settling disputes.”¹⁴ Evidently it had slipped Barak’s mind that it was Arab leaders like Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Kings Abdullah and Hussein of Jordan, and Hafaz Assad of Syria who reached and maintained compromise agreements with an Israel that was far more reluctant to sign them than were the Arabs.

Yet, up to a point, Barak was willing to act against his own predispositions, because his pragmatic, realistic side convinced him that for two reasons Israel had to settle with the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world. First, he had come to believe that it was no longer possible for Israel to rule over another people without continued violence and the eventual destruction of Israeli democracy itself. Even more importantly, Barak is one of the few Israeli leaders to have publicly acknowledged the intolerable dangers to Israel of war with an Arab world that is increasingly likely to acquire weapons of mass destruction: “Israel is galloping toward disaster . . . [I]f we do not reach a solution and the window of opportunity closes, we will find ourselves in a very sharp deterioration. It is impossible to set a timetable. It is impossible to know exactly what the trigger will be. Large-scale terrorist attacks . . . or a fundamentalist wave of operations against us—which the Americans and the rest of the world will be wary of dealing with for fear of their own interests—and with simple nuclear instruments and means of launching in Arab states in the background. . . . Therefore, I understand that we have an interest of a very high order in trying to reach agreements now.”¹⁵

It is hard to reconcile Barak’s understanding of these realities with his behavior, which destroyed the chances for a settlement: he refused to carry out the phased withdrawals of Israeli troops required by the Oslo and subsequent signed agreements, he failed to implement his promise to the Palestinians to withdraw from several Arab villages neighboring Jerusalem, he imposed re-

¹³ See especially the op ed column of Amira Hass in *Ha’aretz*, 21 December 1999. “Barak’s jargon,” Hass wrote, “is identical to that of Gush Emunim,” the far-right fundamentalist settler movement.

¹⁴ Interview with Ari Shavit, *Ha’aretz*, 2 February 2001.

¹⁵ Barak first pointed to the looming nuclear danger as requiring an Arab-Israeli settlement in an interview in the *Jerusalem Post*, 24 September 1999; the more recent quote is from the Shavit interview.

peated closures and economic hardship on the Palestinians, and he authorized a continuation of Israeli roadbuilding, land confiscations, and settlement expansion in both East Jerusalem and elsewhere on the West Bank at the greatest rate since 1992, exceeding even that of the Netanyahu government.¹⁶ Even as he was meeting with Arafat at Camp David, Barak was preparing a new Israeli government budget for 2001 that included increased subsidies of various kinds to entice Israelis to move into East Jerusalem and the West Bank settlements.¹⁷

In view of the settlement expansion, Barak's past (or continued) ideology, his distaste for Arabs in general and Arafat in particular, his endless—sometimes almost daily—radical flipflops, and the peremptory manner in which he dealt with the Palestinians at Camp David, even some of his own cabinet ministers wondered whether he had been seriously seeking a settlement and was really prepared to pay the necessary price for it. Or was he “carrying out a dangerous maneuver, the aim of which was to corner Arafat and show the whole world that . . . [Arafat] was refusing peace?”¹⁸

No one understands Barak, and it will probably never be known whether he was cynical and Machiavellian, seeking (as several Israeli columnists now suggest) to preserve the essence of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank under the guise of negotiating a settlement.¹⁹ Or—as seems more likely—did he at some level genuinely want a settlement but was so ambivalent, confused, and autocratic that he was the wrong man for the job?

In a final act of self-destruction and incoherence, Barak all but ensured the Israeli public's rejection of the Camp David framework and the subsequent landslide electoral victory of Ariel Sharon by presenting a serious compromise with the Palestinians not as the necessary foundation for a secure peace but as an unavoidable catastrophe, a bitter pill that he himself could barely swallow.²⁰ When the Palestinians rejected the Barak/Clinton take-it-or-leave-it proposals at Camp David, Barak interpreted this as proof that “the Palestinians are still clinging to the ‘phased theory’ as a practical plan”²¹—that is, the strategy of destroying Israel in stages. If that were the case, small wonder that Barak failed to convince the Israeli public that he was a better man than Sharon to deal with the problem.

¹⁶ *Ha'aretz*, 27 September 1999; *New York Times*, 28 September 1999.

¹⁷ *Ha'aretz*, 27 February 2001. In Barak's final year in office, nearly 2000 new housing units were constructed, the highest number since Ariel Sharon had served as Housing and Construction minister in 1992. See *Ha'aretz*, 5 March 2001.

¹⁸ Zeev Schiff, *Ha'aretz*, 9 February 2001.

¹⁹ For example, “many of Oslo's supporters held that the new arrangements . . . would replace direct Israeli control . . . with a form of indirect Israeli control, through the Palestinian Authority . . . and thereby continue its occupation of Palestinian territory.” See Meron Benvenisti, *Ha'aretz*, 8 March 2001.

²⁰ As put by Gideon Levy, *Ha'aretz*, 31 December 2000.

²¹ Shavit interview, *Ha'aretz*, 2 February 2001.

CAMP DAVID

The general perception of the Camp David summit negotiations in July 2000 is that Barak made an unprecedented and generous offer to the Palestinians, only to be met by a shocking if not perverse rejection by Arafat, who was not only unwilling to compromise but responded by ordering a violent uprising at just the moment when the chances for peace had never been greater.

There was just enough surface plausibility in this narrative initially to have persuaded even the Israeli peace camp that they had naively misunderstood the real intentions of the Palestinian leadership and that Israel really did lack a partner for peace. But this disillusion with the Palestinians quickly gave way to a more sober reassessment among serious Israeli analysts, many of whom now are far more critical of Barak's proposals and developed a much greater empathetic understanding of the plight of Arafat and the Palestinians.

The first difficulty in assessing Camp David, as well as subsequent Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that continued until just before the February elections, is that all of Barak's proposals were verbal; evidently seeking to keep all his options open, even as he was supposedly negotiating a final settlement, Barak refused to allow the creation of an official record. As a result, even the participants at Camp David and at subsequent meetings have differing accounts of precisely what Barak offered.²²

Still, there is general agreement on the main lines of Barak's verbal proposals:

- Israel would agree to a demilitarized Palestinian state in Gaza and 82–88 percent of the West Bank. In subsequent discussions with the Palestinians, Israeli negotiators apparently improved this offer to about 92 percent of the West Bank, though it is not clear whether Barak approved this change.
- On boundaries, Barak proposed to have Israel return to its pre-1967 borders, with what he portrayed as only minor exceptions. A small part of the West Bank would be annexed to Israel, in areas immediately contiguous to Jerusalem or to the pre-1967 Israeli lines, within which 80 percent of the Israeli settlers were located. As compensation for this annexation of Palestinian land, there would be a territorial exchange, in which the Palestinian state would be given some Israeli land in the Negev desert adjacent to the Gaza Strip.
- On the remainder of the settlements in the heavily Palestinian-populated Gaza Strip and West Bank heartland—many of which contained the most fanatical settlers—Barak was murky. It is still not known whether he contemplated that these settlements would be removed upon an overall agree-

²² As William B. Quandt, a former U.S. government official and one of the most prominent U.S. specialists on the Arab-Israeli conflict, has put it: “verbal understandings had a way of dissolving when the Americans tried to translate them into concrete terms . . . as a result, it was hard to know at the end, what if anything, had been agreed upon.” William B. Quandt, “Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 (Winter 2001): 33. See also Akiva Eldar, “On the Basis of the Nonexistent Camp David Understandings,” *Ha'aretz*, 16 November 2001.

ment; whether they would be allowed to remain in place if they so chose, but as part of the new state of Palestine; or whether they would be under nominal Palestinian sovereignty but actual Israeli military control.²³ In all likelihood, not even Barak knew his own mind on this crucial issue.

- On Jerusalem, Barak proposed to incorporate into an enlarged Greater Jerusalem all the Jewish settlements that had been built throughout Arab East Jerusalem since 1967, as well as those in the city's suburbs, which in fact extend far into the West Bank. The Palestinians would be given sovereignty over the remaining Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, as well as over the Muslim Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, and they would be allowed to establish their capital in these areas. Israel would retain sovereignty over the rest of the Old City, though at least for a while Barak apparently considered some kind of mixed sovereignty over what the Israelis call the Temple Mount and the Arabs call Haram al-Sharif, meaning the plateau on which stand the two major Muslim holy places, the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock.
- On the Jordan river valley and nearby mountain tops, Barak insisted on continued Israeli settlements, early warning stations, and military bases and patrols for a period of six-twelve years, after which the Israeli security requirements could be reevaluated. Evidently Barak left open the possibility that these Israeli forces could be nominally part of a broader international peacekeeping force, but it was clear that Israel would continue its military presence and effective control over the area.
- On the water issue, Barak apparently proposed only that Israel and the Palestinians cooperate on expanding the water resources for both states, principally through desalination. However, most of the existing water aquifers would be located within the 6–8 percent of the West Bank that would be annexed by Israel.
- On the Palestinian refugee issue, Barak refused to acknowledge that Israel bore any moral or historical responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem, even rejecting Palestinian papers that quoted extensively from Israeli memoirs, military statements, and the Israeli new history scholarship.²⁴ Nor was he open to considering the possibility of distinguishing between the principle and the practical implementation of any Palestinian refugee rights. At most, Barak would allow some 10,000 refugees to return to Israel as part of a family reunification program, not as a Palestinian right but as an Israeli gesture.

²³ One of Barak's advisers at Camp David, Joseph Alpher, is vague on the question of the the nonannexed settlements, writing that they would "gradually" come under Palestinian rule, and that "some particularly problematic settlements might be deliberately dismantled by Israel." See "Camp David and the Intifada," Americans for Peace Now Issue Brief, 7 December 2000.

²⁴ Akram Hanieh, "The Camp David Papers," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 (Winter 2001): 82. Hanieh is the editor of the Palestinian daily *al-Avam*, a close adviser to Arafat, and a member of the Palestinian delegation at Camp David.

It is true that Barak's proposal went further than any other previous Israeli offer to the Palestinians, especially in agreeing to a Palestinian state and to the sharing of at least part of Jerusalem. On the other hand, it is no less true that Barak's proposals fell far short of a genuinely fair compromise that would result in a viable Palestinian state. Within a few weeks of Camp David, a number of Israeli political analysts had reached this conclusion.²⁵ Particularly revealing was the forthright assessment of Ze'ev Schiff, the dean of Israel's military/security journalists and a centrist in the Israeli political spectrum. According to Schiff, because of Barak's ongoing violations of the spirit of the Oslo agreements—"above all . . . the relentless expansion of the existing settlements and the establishment of new settlements, with a concomitant expropriation of Palestinian land . . . in and around Jerusalem, and elsewhere as well"—the Palestinians had been "shut in from all sides." Thus, Schiff concluded, "the prospect of being able to establish a viable state was fading right before their eyes. They were confronted with an intolerable set of options: to agree to the spreading occupation . . . or to set up wretched Bantustans, or to launch an uprising."²⁶

As both the Palestinians and Israeli political analysts began to draw up detailed maps, it became evident not only that Gaza and the West Bank would be divided by the State of Israel, but that each of those two areas would in turn be divided into enclaves by the Israeli settlements, highways, and military positions, the links between which "would always be at the mercies of Israel, the Israel Defense Forces and the settlers."²⁷ With little or no control over its water resources, with no independently controlled border access to neighboring countries, and with even its internal freedom of movement and commerce subject to continued Israeli closures, the already impoverished Palestinian state would be economically completely dependent on—and vulnerable to—Israel.²⁸

In greater detail, this is what the consequences of Barak's proposals would have been:

Borders. First, the Jerusalem "metropolitan area," which since 1967 had been expanded to include almost one-fifth of the entire West Bank, would now be incorporated into the city. The eastern boundaries of this "Greater Jerusalem" and the other newly annexed settlements would reach almost to the Palestinian town of Jericho, itself only a short distance from the Jordan River and

²⁵ Especially the Israeli Peace Now movement, the Meretz political party, and leading columnists of *Ha'aretz*, including Ze'ev Schiff, Meron Benvenisti, Amira Hass, Gideon Levy, Akiva Eldar, and Danny Rubinstein.

²⁶ *Ha'aretz*, 24 November 2000.

²⁷ Amira Hass, *Ha'aretz*, 14 November 2000.

²⁸ As Hanieh summed it up: "The three huge settlement blocs in the north, center, and south of the West Bank were expanded and they were connected to each other and to Israel by large areas of Palestinian land in such a way as to control Palestinian water resources in the West Bank." See Hanieh, "Camp David Papers," 83.

Dead Sea. The net effect of these Israeli facts on the ground would be to split the West Bank nearly in half.²⁹

Second, the so-called blocs of settlements that Barak proposed to annex were ten times the area of Tel Aviv and contained Palestinian villages whose population of some 120,000 was actually greater than the settler population. What would happen to that Arab population? Since it was inconceivable that Israel would want to incorporate a large number of new Arab citizens into the Jewish state, presumably they would be relocated or transferred by one means or another, thereby adding still further to the refugee problem, with all the moral and practical problems that would entail.

Third, the land that Barak proposed to give to the Palestinian state in a territorial exchange was only about 10 percent of what Israel was taking from the Palestinians. Moreover, it was empty desert. By contrast, the land that Israel would annex was relatively fertile; even more important, it contained most of the West Bank underground water aquifers—precisely why the settlements had been put there in the first place.³⁰

Israeli military control. The independence of the Palestinian state would have been severely compromised—perhaps nullified—by the continuation of Israeli military control throughout the new state. Under the terms of Barak’s proposals, Israel would continue to control all of Palestine’s border access points with the outside world; would continue to patrol and protect all the Jewish settlements that remained in place in the West Bank, and perhaps even in Gaza; and would remain for at least six years—perhaps indefinitely, for all Palestinians knew—throughout the Jordan River valley.

Jerusalem. The situation in Jerusalem would have been intolerable for the Palestinians—and not simply for religious or symbolic reasons. As noted, Barak insisted that the Palestinians accept all of Israel’s “facts on the ground” since 1967, except that they would be given sovereignty over the remaining Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The problem was that these neighborhoods would be isolated and impoverished enclaves, cut off not only from the rest of the Palestinian state but even from each other by the Jewish neighborhoods, roads, and military outposts. Since 1967 it had been Israeli policy to establish Jewish political and economic control over all of Jerusalem and to create conditions that would convince the Arab residents to leave. To this end, highly-subsidized Jewish neighborhoods were built in East Jerusalem, while the Arab neighborhoods were left in poverty, denied economic assistance and even most city services. As a result, even if Arafat had agreed to Barak’s proposals, the

²⁹ Among many analyses, see Danny Rubinstein, *Haaretz*, 29 October 2000.

³⁰ For detailed analyses of the proposed territorial exchange, see the statement by Peace Now, 7 December 2000; Akiva Eldar, *Ha’aretz*, 20 October 2000; the “Palestinian Response to the Clinton Proposal,” 30 December 2000, reprinted in *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories*, January-February 2001; and Hanieh, “Camp David Papers.”

long-run prospects for Jewish-Arab stability in the context of such extreme political, social, and economic inequality would have been dismal.

Some former Jerusalem city officials and city planners, including Deputy Mayor Meron Benvenisti, now openly admit that this was the purpose of Israel's policies. For example, see a major but little-remarked story in the *New York Times* on 15 March 1997, in which a number of current and former Israeli officials admitted that "political planning" and "lopsided development strategies" had been employed to ensure Jewish dominance over Jerusalem and to encourage the Palestinians to move out of the city into neighboring West Bank towns. Even long-time Jerusalem mayor, Teddy Kollek, who in the past had claimed he did everything he could to help the Jerusalem's Arab population, spoke quite differently in an 10 October 1990 interview with the Israeli newspaper, *Ma'ariv*. The Arabs of East Jerusalem, he bluntly admitted, had become "second and third class citizens," for whom "the mayor [that is, Kollek himself] nurtured nothing and built nothing. For Jewish Jerusalem I did something. . . . For East Jerusalem? Nothing!"

The symbolic/religious issues of Jerusalem centered on political sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Since 1967, the Israelis have controlled the entire Old City, although they have allowed Muslim religious authorities to administer the mosques on the Temple Mount. As indicated, at Camp David there were indications that Barak was considering a variety of suggested compromises: shared Jewish-Arab sovereignty over the Temple Mount, or "the sovereignty of God" rather than any state sovereignty, or an arrangement by which Israel would have sovereignty over the Western Wall on the lower part of the Mount, the Palestinians (or perhaps an international Muslim agency) would have sovereignty over the mosques on top of the Mount.

Arafat apparently rejected any settlement that would dilute Palestinian sovereignty over all of the Old City, save for the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall. In some ways, this was a surprisingly hardline position. But, under Barak's proposals, Israel effectively would continue to control access to the Islamic religious shrines—a power that had frequently been employed in recent years to prevent Palestinians from outside Jerusalem from entering the Old City. As Arafat told Clinton, in responding to his proposed compromise under which Israel would allow the Palestinians a "sovereign presidential compound" next to al-Aqsa Mosque: "So there will be a small island surrounded by Israeli soldiers who control the entrances."³¹ Moreover, in one important respect, Barak actually hardened the Israeli position when he demanded that a place be set aside on top of the Temple Mount for Jewish prayer. When Israel captured the Old City in 1967, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan had prohibited Jews from praying on top of the Temple Mount (as opposed to the Jewish Western Wall at its base) in the hopes of avoiding a religious conflict with not only the Palestinians but with the entire Muslim world. This prohibition has

³¹ Quoted by Hanieh, "The Camp David Papers," 35.

stood since then, challenged—until Barak—only by the most extreme of Jewish fundamentalist sects.³² In the last analysis, because the entire Muslim world insisted on undivided Muslim sovereignty over Harem al-Sharif, Arafat had little choice in the matter.³³ In any case, in the months following Camp David, Barak began retreating from his apparent willingness to consider compromises over the Temple Mount; little more was heard about God's or shared sovereignty.

Water. Barak's Camp David proposals effectively perpetuated Israel's control over most of the West Bank's water, since the most important aquifers would be incorporated into the newly annexed Israeli territory. If for no other reason, this made the Barak plan intolerable to the Palestinians, and a strong indication that Barak continued to resist the establishment of a genuinely independent and viable Palestinian state.

Right of return. Another intractable issue, at least on its face, was "the right of return" for the Palestinian refugees. Almost no Israeli, no matter how far to the "left," can accept the nominal—not actual—Palestinian insistence that all the refugees have the right to return to their homes and villages in Israel, most of which, in any case, no longer exist. The "return" of some three million Palestinians would mean that within a short time there would no longer be a Jewish majority in Israel, destroying the very *raison d'être* of the creation of a Jewish state. In any case, given nearly a century of mutual violence and hatred, a large influx of Palestinians would be a formula for unending civil, religious, and ethnic warfare. There are no contemporary precedents or models for two peoples long at war with each other suddenly becoming capable of living in peace and harmony within the confines of one small state. Cyprus, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and many other states provide grim counter-examples.

However, Barak did not merely reject the Palestinian right of return, he also flatly refused to acknowledge any Israeli moral or practical responsibility for the events of 1948. That is a different matter altogether, not only because

³² "Suddenly, allowing Jews to pray in the Haram al-Sharif became an essential Israeli demand, adding a religious dimension to the conflict [and] toying with explosives that could ignite the Middle East and the Islamic world." See Hanieh, "Camp David Papers," 83. Similarly, of one of Israel's leading historians on Jerusalem has noted: "Within Israel, the only constituency for that demand is a radical fringe that wants to drive the Muslims from the holy site. For Palestinians, just raising the idea confirmed the worst fears about Israeli intentions at al-Aqsa." See Gershon Gorenberg, "The Real Blunders," *Jerusalem Report*, 20 November 2000.

³³ Clinton administration officials have confirmed a Palestinian report that when Arafat was under considerable pressure from Clinton at Camp David because of his unyielding position on the Temple Mount, Arafat said to the president: "Do you want to attend my funeral? I will not relinquish Jerusalem and the holy places." See *Ha'aretz*, 17 September 2000. Moreover, according to Menahem Klein, an Israeli academician specializing in Jerusalem affairs and a member of the Israeli delegation to Camp David, Arafat is genuinely religious and his interest in the Islamic holy sites is authentic, not a tactic. See *Ha'aretz*, 15 March 2001.

it is simply a lie to deny Israeli responsibility, but more importantly because such an acknowledgment would pave the way for a compromise on the issue, the essence of which would be to separate the principle of return from its implementation.

THE PALESTINIAN RESPONSE

Thus, the Israelis and Palestinians remained far apart on every major issue at Camp David—not just over the Temple Mount and the right of return, as was generally believed at the time.³⁴ Yet, most Israelis and Americans have blamed only Arafat for the breakdown at Camp David and the subsequent Palestinian uprising. Critics have made two general arguments. The more extreme one is that Arafat simply pocketed Barak's offers at Camp David and was willing to make no compromises of his own. In this view, which implies—preposterously—that it was the Palestinians rather than the Israelis who held all the cards, Arafat thought that if he held out long enough he could eventually reach his real goal, which was the destruction of Israel in stages.

This argument ignores the enormous power differential between Israel and the Palestinians, disregards the long history of Palestinian compromises going back to the 1970s and formalized in 1988, and fails to observe the additional compromises that Arafat made both at Oslo in 1993 and Camp David in 2000. By officially agreeing since 1988 to accept a two-state solution, with Palestine but not Israel demilitarized, Arafat and the Palestinian Authority accepted that Israel would permanently be far stronger than Palestine and would comprise 78 percent of the land of Palestine, as that was defined in the League of Nations Mandate to Britain in 1919. In fact, at Camp David, Arafat went even further; for in agreeing to accept the incorporation of at least some Jewish settlements into an expanded Jerusalem, including formerly Arab East Jerusalem, he was reducing still further the percentage of Palestine that the Palestinian state would comprise.³⁵

Indeed, there is a much better case that at both Oslo and Camp David, Arafat went too far in accepting Israeli-created facts on the ground. By accepting at Oslo the postponement of the problem of the Jewish settlements in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, Arafat allowed Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu, and Barak to claim that the continued Israeli expansion did not violate the Oslo agreements. And by apparently accepting at Camp David Israeli annexation of the Jewish neighborhoods and Palestinian sovereignty only over the noncontig-

³⁴ This is emphasized in the quasi-official Palestinian assessment of Camp David by Hanieh, and it has also been confirmed in an important speech by Robert Malley, a Clinton administration negotiator at Camp David, quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, 11 March 2001.

³⁵ This was candidly admitted by Joseph Alpher, one of Barak's leading advisers at Camp David, in his analysis, "Camp David and the Intifada." Quandt also argues that the Palestinian acceptance of Israel within the 1967 lines "was already a huge concession and should not be starting point for further concessions." See his "Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 31.

uous Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, Arafat in effect had collaborated with Barak in creating an inherently unstable, as well as unjust future explosion point.

Thus, the argument that an uncompromising Arafat rejected a golden opportunity for peace has no foundation. The more moderate charge against Arafat—for example, as argued in a series of influential columns by Thomas Friedman, the chief diplomatic correspondent of the *New York Times*—is that while Barak’s offers at Camp David did not go far enough in meeting legitimate Palestinian demands, Arafat should have conditionally accepted them as the basis for continued negotiations, making counterproposals rather than ending diplomacy in favor of violence. In fact, Friedman and many Israeli critics of Arafat now commonly argue that the Palestinian Authority’s rejection of Barak’s offers and his launching of “this idiotic uprising” can only be interpreted as proof that Arafat never would have settled for a two-state compromise, because he has never “given up his long-term aim of eliminating Israel.”³⁶

Though this argument, if only because of its endless assertion, is increasingly passing for revealed truth, there is no evidence or logical basis for it. It is evidently based on the unarticulated premise that the Palestinian rejection of Camp David and the subsequent launching of the intifada leaves no other possible inference. However, Barak’s take-it-or-leave-it proposals would not have allowed the Palestinians to have a truly viable or independent state, and his actions on the ground, especially the ongoing and even escalated expansion of the settlements and military road-building, would have perpetuated, consolidated, and made even more irreversible the Israeli occupation over much of the West Bank and Gaza.

In the final analysis, of course, it could never be proved that some Palestinians—possibly including Arafat—did not harbor, in some secret corner of their dreams, the hope of regaining all of Palestine. But the enormous power disparities between Israel and a demilitarized Palestinian state would preclude any attempt to operationalize such dreams, if they exist. Once a Palestinian state was established, it would be on permanent notice that continued violence against Israel would inexorably lead to an overwhelming Israeli military response that would permanently end Palestinian statehood. In those circumstances, an Israeli crushing of the Palestinians would be seen throughout the world as a legitimate act of self-defense.

The argument that Arafat should have continued to rely on diplomacy to remedy the inadequacies of Barak’s Camp David proposals is a more serious and persuasive one. Indeed, in light of the Israeli backlash against the Palestinian uprising, the election of Sharon, and the subsequent Palestinian escalation of the uprising into outright terrorism directed against the Israeli population within the Green Line, there clearly are reasonable grounds for criticism of Arafat’s judgment. Even so, there are serious problems with this argument.

³⁶ Thomas Friedman, “It Only Gets Worse,” *New York Times*, 22 May 2001.

First, it is impossible to know whether Barak was prepared to go any further than he did at Camp David. To be sure, there are a number of reliable reports that at subsequent secret Israeli-Palestinian negotiations held in the Sinai resort of Taba, both the Israeli and Palestinian delegates, desperate to reach an agreement and save the peace process before the impending election of Ariel Sharon, were more flexible than they had been at Camp David. On the other hand, there is good reason to doubt that Barak would have accepted further concessions made by his own negotiating team, for during this period he made a number of public statements that actually backtracked from his Camp David positions, for example on whether he was willing to share sovereignty with Arafat or the Arab world on the Temple Mount. No doubt the approaching elections constrained Barak on this and other issues, but that doesn't change the fact that Arafat had little reason to expect further Israeli movement.

Even more importantly, the historical record since 1967, and especially since the Oslo agreements of 1993, makes it clear that the longer "the peace process" is stretched out, the more Israel takes advantage of its unconstrained power to preempt the outcome of negotiations by creating facts on the ground. That is the central problem in the argument that Arafat should have agreed to continue the negotiations indefinitely, or settle for some kind of partial or "interim" accord, which continued to postpone definitive agreements on the major issues: borders, settlements, Jerusalem, water, and the right of return.

In short, any criticism of Arafat, if it is to be taken seriously, must face up to the fact that the Israelis—certainly including Barak and now Sharon—have given the Palestinians every reason to believe that an interim or transition period would not be one toward general peace and a fair compromise, but rather toward a deeper and more irreversible Israeli consolidation of its occupation.

Furthermore, the criticisms of Arafat are based on the dubious premise that he authorized or at least substantially controlled the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, employing it as a strategy to force greater Israeli concessions in the negotiating process. To begin with, the time line doesn't support this argument: the intifada did not break out until two months after the breakdown at Camp David, following the Barak-approved visit of Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount. Second, even the Israeli intelligence services were divided on whether or to what extent Arafat controlled the intifada. To this date, no one knows whether Arafat ordered the uprising or whether it was an explosion from below—one that occurred not only because of Palestinian despair at a "peace process" that had produced even greater Israeli repression and expansion since Oslo, but also because of the Palestinian public's frustration over Arafat's concessions and corrupt, authoritarian rule.³⁷ In this view, Arafat could only hope

³⁷ Some Israeli commentators (for example, Amira Hass, *Ha'aretz* 21 February 2000) have argued that it was a deliberate Israeli strategy after Oslo to coopt the Palestinian Authority and thus retain indirect Israeli control over most of the West Bank, by granting special economic, travel, and other privileges to Palestinian political, military, and economic elites—many of whom personally prospered in the 1990s, even as the suffering of the public worsened. For strong statements of the view that the al-Aqsa intifada was an explosion from below, brought about by Palestinian despair directed both at

to survive as he had done many times in the past, not so much by leading Palestinian opinion but by following it, riding on the back of the tiger rather than in control of it.

Probably both views are oversimplified, for there is increasing evidence to support a more nuanced explanation of the intifada. It is likely that Arafat neither ordered the intifada as a strategic move in the negotiating process with Barak, nor is it today simply an explosion from below. The most plausible interpretation is that the al-Aqsa intifada began as a largely spontaneous eruption, but one over which Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have gained some but by no means complete control. In particular, there is no evidence and no Israeli intelligence consensus on whether Arafat ordered, acquiesced in, or was powerless to control the recent wave of Palestinian terrorist bombings inside Israel.

An alternative line of argument would separate the moral from the practical issues in evaluating the Palestinian revolution after the Oslo/Camp David breakdown. Though proponents of nonviolence will disagree, throughout history, revolution has often been justified when the political process has failed and there is no other way to redress serious injustices.

The Palestinians have repeatedly said that the intifada is not directed against the state or people of Israel proper, but only against the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This claim, which has great moral as well as political significance, was given credibility by the fact that with but few exceptions, Palestinian violence (at least until the election of Sharon) was directed almost exclusively at either Israeli military forces or the most external settlers in the occupied territories—not against Israel within its pre-1967 boundaries.

The spread of outright Palestinian terrorism—bombings directed against civilians—into Israel proper has changed the moral equation, and perhaps the practical one as well. Until the recent bombings, a strong case could be made that it was morally irrelevant whether or not Arafat controlled the Palestinian intifada, whether or not it was a designed strategy from above or a spontaneous explosion from below, or some combination of both, for the Palestinians not only had just cause to rebel against Israeli occupation and repression but had also generally employed disciplined and constrained methods that distinguished between Israeli society and Israel as an occupying force.

To be sure, the moral issue remains complex, because the Israeli policies of collective punishment and closures have done great harm to Palestinian civilians. However, the practical consequences of the Palestinian turn toward violence—even when it was limited to the occupation—is another matter.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority because of the continued Israeli occupation and worsening economic situation since Oslo, see two articles by Henry Siegman, formerly a major leader in the official American Jewish community, now at the Council on Foreign Relations: "Israel: A Historic Statement," *New York Review of Books*, 8 February 2001; and "Hopes for Peace Under Sharon," *Ha'aretz*, 27 February 2001.

In the short run, it has been disastrous, and there are increasing Palestinian voices, including even some PA officials, calling for reassessment and the consideration of unarmed resistance to the occupation.³⁸ On the other hand, it is far too soon to know whether the peace process has been dealt a fatal or only temporary blow; a few years of Sharon may yet convince the Israeli public of the need for greater compromise with the Palestinians.

Put differently, after Camp David the Palestinians faced an impossible dilemma: indefinitely prolonged negotiations almost certainly would have consolidated and deepened the Israeli occupation, while armed resistance to it risked an Israeli backlash and even worse repression. Maybe—at least in principle—there was a third way. No doubt a Palestinian Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. would have been preferable to Yasir Arafat, though one may doubt that their methods would have had any greater success, at least in the short run, in persuading the Israelis to return to their 1967 lines.

Moreover, at least until the Palestinian shift toward outright terrorism, one should hesitate to blame the victims for choosing the wrong resistance strategy. Still, given the immense power disparities between Israel and the Palestinians, the inability or unwillingness of the Israelis, the American government, and the American Jewish community to abandon the discredited Israeli mythology, and the moral as well as practical costs of Palestinian terrorism, in the long run there appears to be no other alternative to negotiations combined with nonviolent resistance to the ongoing Israeli occupation

A FUTURE SETTLEMENT

The Palestinian uprising of 2000–2001 has made it clearer than ever that there can be no genuine settlement that is both fair and stable over the long run without a near-complete Israeli withdrawal to its pre-June 1967 borders. Only a few Israeli peace activists and intellectuals are prepared to consider this today, but that was also true a decade ago about the need for a Palestinian state, and a year ago about the need to divide Jerusalem.

The 1948 expansion of Israel in the wake of the Arab attack arguably served Israel's security, because the 1947 UN partition plan left Israel with borders that would have been difficult to defend indefinitely against determined enemies. But even that is not an open-and-shut case, for Israel's refusal—however understandable—to return to the UN boundaries or to allow the return of the Palestinian refugees that it had driven out had the consequence of ensuring that Israel *would* have determined enemies.

The 1967 expansion of Israel into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, however, is not a close case: it was neither motivated by nor had the consequence

³⁸ For example see the column by the Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab in the *Jerusalem Post*, 1 March 2001; and the remarks of the PA leader Ahmen Qurei: "The intifada will continue, but it's not necessary for it to be a military intifada. It can take another shape." Quoted in *Ha'aretz*, 11 March 2001.

of enhancing Israeli security. The motivation was ideological, another step in the fulfillment of the Zionist dream of Jewish sovereignty over all of ancient Palestine. The consequence was to intensify Palestinian nationalist resistance to the Israeli occupation and to exacerbate the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

The 1979 Israeli-Egyptian and 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaties were made possible by Israel's willingness to return all the territories captured in 1967, in exchange for their demilitarization and other steps to enhance Israeli security. An Israeli-Syrian peace agreement was nearly reached in the 1990s, based on the same principles: a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace, the demilitarization of the returned territory, and other security measures.

The Palestinians are unlikely to accept less. Even if some of their leaders, like Arafat, were once willing to do so, the settlement would have been unlikely to hold. Still, there is some flexibility in how the principle of complete Israeli withdrawal could be implemented, for Palestinian leaders have repeatedly said that once Israel accepts the principle of full withdrawal, the Palestinians will be willing to negotiate on how to operationalize it.

In practice, it is probable that Israel can annex some of the West Bank settlements immediately adjacent to the 1967 lines, for Palestine Authority negotiators have suggested that they could accept small territorial adjustments that would bring about 50 percent of the settlers (as opposed to the 80 percent demanded by Barak) within Israel, provided that the annexations don't include substantial numbers of Palestinian villages and that Palestine is compensated with land from Israel that is comparable in both size and quality. For example, Palestinian leaders have privately suggested that they would give serious consideration to a territorial exchange in which Israel gave the Palestinian state some land adjacent to the Gaza and West Bank borders and a column of land linking Gaza to the West Bank through Israel's Negev desert.³⁹

It is hard to see how the Jerusalem issues can be resolved without a near complete return to the pre-1967 status quo: the division of the city into Jewish West Jerusalem and Arab East Jerusalem, with Muslim sovereignty over the Old City, especially Haram al-Sharif, except for the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall. Difficult as this issue is, for both sides it is largely symbolic. In that case, it may fairly be asked, why should the Israelis have to relinquish their claim in favor of the Palestinians? First, on moral grounds it is not unreasonable for the side that has been mostly in the wrong to have to pay a higher price than the victims. More importantly, no Arab or Islamic state will consent to continued Israeli sovereignty over some of the most important mosques in the Muslim world. Neither Arafat nor the Israelis can afford to antagonize this world or agree to anything that might expose the moderate Arab governments of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and perhaps even Syria to mass outrage.

³⁹ See the *Ha'aretz* news stories of 29 and 31 January 2001.

What will be even harder for the Israelis to swallow is that they must also reverse thirty-five years of Jewish expansion into East Jerusalem and neighboring areas of the West Bank. Even if Arafat had been willing in the past to accept the preservation of some of the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and its suburbs, it is improbable that such a compromise would now prove to be stable. In the present climate, it is hard to imagine that the Palestinian people will accept the continued presence of Israeli towns and neighborhoods within what they legitimately regard as Palestinian territory.

Similarly, there is little possibility of a stable settlement if Israel continues to insist that it retain *de facto* military control over the Jordan River valley, for the Palestinians will not agree to any Israeli military presence in any part of their territory. On the other hand, there were strong indications at Camp David and subsequent negotiations that the Palestinians would agree to something like the Sinai peninsula settlement and precedent: the stationing of an international force—including American soldiers—in the West Bank.⁴⁰

Under such arrangements and in the context of an overall Arab-Israeli peace settlement—including a still obtainable Israeli-Syrian peace agreement—Israel's legitimate security interests would be well served. The solution, as it was in the agreements with both Egypt and Jordan, is to distinguish between Israel's political boundaries and its security boundaries. Israel's western political boundary is its border with the Sinai peninsula, but its security boundary is the Suez Canal—meaning that the violation of the demilitarization agreement and the crossing of the canal by Egyptian armies would mean war.

Similarly, Israel's eastern political boundary is the Jordan River and the Israel-Jordanian border from the Dead Sea south to Eilat and the Gulf of Aqaba. However, its eastern security boundary is the Jordanian border with Iraq—meaning that the presence of any hostile armies in Jordan advancing towards Israel, whether they be Syrian, Iraqi, or Iranian, would be a *cassus belli* that would precipitate an overwhelming Israeli response long before the armies reached the Jordan Valley.⁴¹

As for the water issue, that too cannot be solved by the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians; the West Bank water aquifers must belong to a Palestinian state. To be sure, Israel would then lose an estimated 25–30 percent of its present fresh water sources, and this would require some transitional sharing agreements. However, within about five years the West Bank aquifers can be replaced by desalination plants and by the importation of water by tankers and pipelines. Furthermore, even if Israel retained all of the West Bank aquifers, it would be a rapidly wasting asset, for within a few years the imbalance between present Israeli resources and water usage would reassert itself. In any case, because of the availability of technological means to solve the water problem,

⁴⁰ Hanieh, "Camp David Papers," 94; see also *Ha'aretz*, 14 August 2000, 27 February 2001.

⁴¹ For a full discussion of the security issues, see Jerome Slater, "Netanyahu, A Palestinian State, and Israeli Security Reassessed," *Political Science Quarterly* 112 (Winter 1997–98): 675–689.

over the longer run the real issue is not so much water as it is money—and the amounts needed are far from intolerable.⁴²

Other than Jerusalem, the most difficult issue is the right of a Palestinian refugee return to Israel, which for reasons already discussed cannot be implemented in literal fashion. However, in the context of an overall peace settlement, the issue would be much less intractable than it appears to be: there is every reason to believe that the issue could be resolved in a manner that would be acceptable to both sides, symbolically and in practice.

In the last decade, there have been a number of authoritative statements by Palestinian leaders that indicate they are prepared to distinguish between the right of return and its implementation, if only Israel will acknowledge its responsibility for having created the problem. For example, in his 1990 article, Abu Iyad, one of the most important PLO officials, wrote that the Palestinians understand that the literal implementation of the right of return is not possible, and that negotiations can resolve the matter: if Israel accepts “the principle of the right of return or compensation.” “We shall for our part remain flexible regarding its implementation . . . we also expect the international community to play its full role concerning the matter of compensation.”⁴³

In the last few months, this position has been reiterated; there have been repeated public statements by high Palestinian leaders that they recognize that Israel can never accept the “return” of large numbers of refugees or their descendants, and that they have no intention of demanding it.⁴⁴

From the variety of Palestinian and Israeli reports on the right-of-return issue, it is clear that the elements of a solution would be an Israeli acknowledgment of its political and moral responsibilities; the return to Israel of a relatively small number of those refugees and their descendants who still have close family ties to Israeli Arabs; the resettlement of most of the others in Palestine—perhaps especially in former Israeli territory acquired by the Palestinians in a territorial exchange, which would allow the Palestinians to say that the refugees had returned to “Israel”;⁴⁵ and the resettlement of the remainder in the new Palestinian state, elsewhere in the Arab world or in the West, with generous

⁴² For example, a 1995 Israeli study concluded that for only \$110 million annually, Israel could meet its current and projected water needs. (*New York Times*, 24 August 1995).

⁴³ See Abu Iyad, “Lowering the Sword,” *Foreign Policy* 78 (Spring 1990): 103. This position has been essentially reconfirmed in recent authoritative Palestinian statements, for example in Hanieh, “Camp David Papers.”

⁴⁴ See the Palestinian reply to the 2000 proposals of President Clinton, in which they state that they are “prepared to think flexibly and creatively about the mechanism for implementation for the right of return.” (*New York Times*, 3 January 2001). As well, Nabil Sha’ath, the Palestinian minister for planning and a close adviser of Yasir Arafat, has recently written that a solution to this issue that “meets the requirements of both sides” is within reach. (*Washington Post*, 15 May 2001).

⁴⁵ This was an idea to which “serious thought” was given in the abortive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations between the failure at Camp David and the election of Sharon. See *Ha’aretz*, 31 January 2001.

economic compensation provided by both Israel and the international community.⁴⁶

In short, it is increasingly clear that the right-of-return issue is far more a symbolic than real obstacle to a settlement. In light of the many indications that the issue is eminently soluble, the continued insistence by Israelis and their defenders that it poses an insurmountable problem suggests that they are unwilling or incapable of listening closely to the Palestinians. Even worse, it is evident that many are simply seizing on the issue as a pretext for their unwillingness to see a settlement that would lead to an independent Palestinian state.

CONCLUSION

With the Israeli election of Ariel Sharon, the intensification of Israeli suppression of the intifada, and the Palestinian terrorist response, the outlook for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement is bleak. Without highly unlikely changes in Israeli policy, there is likely to be further Palestinian violence and terrorism, leading to a vicious cycle of greatly intensified Israeli retaliation and Palestinian counter-retaliation.

Even the possibility of an escalation into a wider Arab-Israeli war cannot be ruled out. To be sure, such a regional war seems unlikely, since Israel and all its neighbors are acutely aware of the potential catastrophic costs of a new war, that could even escalate into the use of biological or nuclear weapons. On the other hand, wars that have seemed irrational in cost-benefit terms—even to their participants—have often occurred, as unforeseen events take over and spin out of control.

Both because it is so much more powerful than the Palestinians and because it is primarily responsible for the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel has the main responsibility for averting a catastrophic escalation and finally reaching a fair settlement. Yet Israel has never been willing to acknowledge its role in the origins and dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict, has never been willing to acknowledge its moral responsibility for the plight of the Palestinians, and has missed a number of opportunities to settle both the Israeli-Palestinian and the larger Arab-Israeli conflict. Blinded by Zionist ideology and by the genuine history of Jewish victimization, Israel has failed to realize that in this conflict—shockingly—it is Israel that is the oppressor and the Palestinians who are the victims.

The weakest part of Zionist ideology has always been its claim, based on biblical history and ancient Jewish inhabitation, to eternal Jewish sovereignty over the entire land of Palestine. Aside from the fact that the historical accuracy of the biblical account is increasingly disputed by modern scholars (including Israeli archaeologists), the ancient historical narrative would be of dubious rel-

⁴⁶ Among the many stories, see the important article by Akiva Eldar, “How to Solve the Palestinian Refugee Problem” *Ha’aretz*, 29 May 2001.

evance even if it were demonstrably accurate, for the passage of two thousand years created a very different political and moral reality.

Many Israelis and their supporters fear that even a partial abandonment of Zionist mythology would have the consequence of delegitimizing the State of Israel today. But this fear is groundless. However questionable the Zionist argument from ancient history or even from the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the Holocaust and then the creation of the State of Israel changed matters decisively, irrefutably, and irrevocably. Since 1948, the only argument necessary to the Zionist case is the existential one: new human realities have been created, Israel exists, and it has a right to live in peace and security. It would be far better and far more conducive to the creation of a genuine peace with the Palestinians and the entire Arab world, if Israel simply rested its case there.

Put differently, because the existential argument is so obviously compelling and unanswerable, an Israeli acknowledgment of past injustices and its acceptance at long last of a genuine and fair compromise would have the consequence of legitimizing rather than delegitimizing Israel among all but the most fanatical Palestinians and Arab leaders. An Israeli willingness to face their history, free of the distortions and myths that have blinded them, is the psychological prerequisite for the establishment of peace for both the Palestinians and Israelis.

The United States also has a responsibility to help avert disaster. First of all, it has a moral responsibility, because it has collaborated with the Israelis in blaming the victims and denying the moral complexity of Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, which from the outset has involved a tragic clash of two legitimate nationalist movements with strong claims to the same land. Over fifty years of nearly unconditional moral, diplomatic, economic, and military support of Israel—however well-intentioned, even noble in motivation—has created for the United States a compelling moral obligation now to counterbalance unconstrained Israeli power and level the playing field.

That is precisely what Bill Clinton failed to do. Although he is generally viewed, both in Israel and the United States, as the greatest American friend Israel has ever had, in fact Clinton's collaboration with Israeli intransigence did great harm to true Israeli interests. Two reasons suggest themselves as explanations for Clinton's abdication of U.S. responsibilities. First, he genuinely loved Israel—not wisely, but too well—a sentiment that was uninformed by true understanding of the history of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Less exaltedly, in the Arab–Israeli conflict as well as his foreign policies in general, Clinton repeatedly sacrificed moral principle or American national interests in favor of domestic pandering.

On taking office, Clinton quickly abandoned the policy position of every American president since 1967: that Israeli settlements in the West Bank were both illegal and an obstacle to peace and that Israel had no right to preempt the future of Jerusalem by unilateral actions. George Bush tied at least part of the American economic aid program to an end of Israeli settlement expansion, and this action had a lot to do with the Israeli public's decision to vote for Rabin over Shamir in the 1992 Israeli elections.

But Clinton, idealizing Rabin, dropped all U.S. pressures and ignored his expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as other actions that undermined the prospects that the Oslo process could bring about a fair settlement. Even after Netanyahu came to power in 1996, Clinton—though now realizing that it was Israel’s policies rather than those of the Palestinians that were blocking peace—acted as though he was powerless to do anything about it. By repeatedly assuring Netanyahu that under no circumstances would the United States use its economic and military assistance programs to induce Israeli policy changes, Clinton gratuitously threw away the considerable American leverage.⁴⁷

Finally, while Clinton threw himself into an effort to bring about a peace settlement in his last months in office, his failure was preordained because of his nearly unqualified support for Barak’s policies. Even after the breakdown of the negotiations at Camp David, when for the first time the Clinton administration decided to publicly present its own peace plan, in fact the plan differed in only minor ways from Barak’s and did not meet the legitimate Palestinian demands about the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Israeli monopolization of water resources, and an end to the Israeli military control of the West Bank, including the Jordan River valley.⁴⁸ Indeed, by not only failing to bridge the Israeli–Palestinian gap but by publicly blaming the Palestinians and even suggesting the possibility of American sanctions against them, Clinton ended up by forfeiting the last remnants of Palestinian or general Arab confidence in U.S. fairness. In the end, Clinton not only completely failed in his sincere but fatally flawed effort to bring about Middle East peace, he triggered a wave of anti-Americanism in the region that has created major problems for American diplomacy in the Bush administration.

Moral obligations aside, the United States has a responsibility to its own self-interests, even to its national security in the most literal sense, to help bring about an overall Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Continued American support of Israeli repression of the Palestinians will certainly further undermine the U.S. relationship with the Arab world, thereby jeopardizing support for such important American national interests as the containment of Iraq and Iran and continued unfettered access to Arab oil. But most important of all, the nuclear or biological terrorism that threatens the Middle East also threatens the United

⁴⁷ This is the central point of Quandt’s important article, in which he compares the effectiveness of Nixon’s and Carter’s carrot-and-stick policies to Clinton’s ineffectiveness. Note also the 1994 attack of Akiva Eldar, the Washington correspondent for *Ha’aretz*, on Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s “groveling” before U.S. Jewish leaders, when he promised “not to put pressure on Israel, God forbid.” (*Ha’aretz*, 2 March 1994) Eldar added that the American Jewish community would not thank Clinton if his policy failed—although that prediction proved to be wrong.

⁴⁸ For a Palestinian account of Clinton’s identification with all the Israeli negotiating positions, see Hanieh, “Camp David Papers.” Quandt and Malley have essentially confirmed this Palestinian account and severely criticize Clinton’s failure throughout the 1990s to have differentiated American national interests from Israeli positions and to have used both carrots and sticks to induce greater Israeli flexibility. See Quandt, “Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict”; Malley, *Jerusalem Post*, 11 March 2001.

States, because of Arab or Islamic fury at the nearly unqualified U.S. support of Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians.

The Bush administration now has two options. It can seriously engage with the problem, but it can do so successfully only if it uses the full range of U.S. leverage over Israel, both carrots and sticks, to induce major changes in Israeli policies. In the past, when the United States has been serious about constraining the Israelis, it has almost always been successful, as for example when it used the leverage afforded by American economic and military assistance programs to induce Israeli pullbacks from Egyptian, Syrian, and Lebanese territory, following the 1956, 1967, and 1982 Israeli–Arab conflicts. However, if such a strategy is either eschewed or fails, and if Israel cannot be dissuaded from its plunge toward disaster, then the United States must protect itself and its national interests by disengaging, pending the day when a genuinely impartial U.S. diplomatic effort might prove successful.

Finally, the American Jewish community has a significant responsibility. Given the influence of the community in American domestic politics and over the Middle East policies of the U.S. government, no changes in U.S. policy can be expected—at any rate, *before* the potentially impending disasters rather than afterward—in the absence of firm public Jewish support. The first step must be an end of the Jewish community’s predilection to turn a blind eye toward the true history and present realities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

In light of history, it is hardly surprising that the Jewish community shrinks from public criticism of Israel, or that it cannot bring itself to face the implications of what Israeli historians themselves have revealed. Yet a continued failure to do so would amount to an abdication of the liberal and humanistic values that the Jewish people are supposed to represent, as well as a betrayal of the real interests of their Israeli brethren.

What Israel desperately needs today, above all from its true friends in America, Jews and Gentiles alike, is not the kind of uninformed and mushy love—not to mention pandering—of a Bill Clinton, but the diplomatic equivalent of tough love. In the late 1970s, the Argentine Jewish leader and journalist Jacobo Timerman fled murderous anti-Semitism in his native country to find refuge in Israel—precisely why Israel had been founded. But Timerman did not forget the broader values, other than sheer survival, that the founding of Israel was meant to serve. In the midst of the disastrous Lebanon war—the main architect of which is now prime minister of Israel—Timerman eloquently called on American Jews to help save Israel from itself, a plea that is even more apt today: “It is possible that only the Jewish people outside of Israel can now do something for us. There are Diaspora Jews who have kept the values of our moral and cultural traditions, which have been trampled here by intolerance and nationalism. . . . It may help those of us who are in Israel to cure the sickness that is destroying Israel.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Jacobo Timerman, “Journal of the Longest War, Part 2,” *New Yorker*, 25 October 1982, 104.