

How Not to Make Peace

*“Conflict Syndrome” and the Demise
of the Oslo Accords*

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CONTENTS

Summary	1
Acknowledgments	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Oslo's Demise: The Search for Understanding	7
3. The Intrinsic Nature of Peacemaking in Protracted Conflicts	11
4. Resurrecting the Peace Process: Uncertainty and Hope	25
5. A Way Forward? Outlines of a Strategy	31
6. Alternative Roads to Peace	37
Notes	43
About the Author	47
About the Institute	49

SUMMARY

The failure of the Oslo Accords has been attributed to a variety of factors, including deficiencies in the accords themselves, failures of implementation, and the play of domestic politics. These are all critical factors that describe *what* happened, but they do not explain *why* each side behaved as it did—that is, *why* each side made choices that would only increase the likelihood of the accords' failure. To understand why each side behaved as it did, we must first understand the "conflict syndrome" that affected the negotiating and decision-making process—a syndrome that is, to varying degrees, present in many protracted conflicts. While the conflict syndrome is never the sole cause of failure in any given peace process and does not affect every conflict in the same way, the significant role it often plays in perpetuating conflict is frequently ignored or undervalued.

Conflict syndrome consists of a set of attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that become embedded over decades of bitter conflict and are difficult to unlearn even if some kind of peace agreement—or exploratory truce—has been signed. The individual elements of the syndrome are familiar, but, taken as a whole, they exert a powerful influence on most peace processes and inform the choices each side makes. Thus, distrusting the opposite side's motives by default, cheating for fear of being cheated, making only tentative concessions that can easily be revoked, and asking the other side to prove its good faith by making large initial concessions, among other things, generate a peace process that can easily become a "race to the bottom." This implies that the stop-and-go, on-and-off, crisis-driven peace processes in the Middle East and elsewhere should not be taken as aberrations: they are the norm that should be anticipated and planned for.

This argument has clear policy implications. Premature ceremonies on the White House lawn and inflated rhetoric that raises expectations too hastily need to be avoided. The search for quick solutions and "last negotiations" is likely to lead to a return of bitter discord. To solve the Middle East conflict, a carefully calibrated peace process—described herein as "gradually accelerating incrementalism"—is needed. Architects of such a process must recognize that elements of the conflict syndrome still persist in the Middle East and will for years to come, that high-risk/high-gain negotiating strategies in such a context are bound to fail, and that demands for stricter compliance with commitments can and should increase as the process begins to provide both sides with tangible evidence that it can produce mutual benefits and is worth preserving.

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INTRODUCTION

Many Israeli and Palestinian politicians and intellectuals came to recognize certain basic facts in the decade before the signing of the Oslo Accords: neither side could defeat the other, at least at an acceptable cost; the overall costs of the conflict to both sides were staggering; parts of both communities were beginning to exhibit “battle fatigue” and a strong desire to live a “normal” life; and the general outlines of a painful but bearable compromise solution—some details aside—had been apparent for many years, indeed perhaps from the partition formula of 1947. Although extremists on both sides totally rejected any compromise, majority support had been growing for some kind of mutually bearable settlement. Put differently, “rational actors” should have seen a clear interest in compromise and the marginalization of extremists. Why then did the Oslo peace process disintegrate so rapidly, and why did a conflict that had moved beyond its earlier existentialist phase return to it so savagely—and perhaps irredeemably?

The conventional explanations for Oslo’s failure, some of which will be discussed below, are better at elucidating what happened during the process rather than why the accords collapsed. One could also argue that such explanations represent partial narratives of Oslo’s fate rather than the whole story. To get at the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict one needs to look at more than the details of any failure to agree on Jerusalem, refugees, or borders—and the Palestinians’ inability or unwillingness to stop terrorism. One must also examine the tacit and unstated assumptions about the nature of the conflict itself that became embedded over time and seemed to mandate policy responses virtually guaranteed to undermine an already fragile peace process. In short, these assumptions generated patterns of behavior that deepened the conflict and produced a kind of Gresham’s Law of protracted conflict: extremists drove out moderates. In such a context, one “easy” explanation for the failure of the peace process—specifically, that one needed Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk but got Yasser Arafat and Benjamin Netanyahu—misses the deeper point that even strong and wise leaders might have chosen badly or felt compelled to make the same kinds of mistakes attributed to their weaker brethren. However, I am *not* arguing that a conflict’s unstated assumptions totally determine outcomes: there are factors that can diminish or overcome such assumptions, as appeared to happen in South Africa in the early 1990s, but these factors are not always present or sufficiently powerful.

The unstated assumptions of a conflict affect the judgment of each side and are likely to affect how difficult questions that hover over any negotiating process are answered: Can the other side ever be trusted? Is real peace possible? Will any agreement offer more than a temporary truce in a continuing existential conflict? Can the ancient attitudes and beliefs that have sustained and deepened the conflict ever be transformed, especially after a seemingly endless exchange of atrocities? And will the leader(s) of the other side be able or willing to expend the necessary domestic political capital on developing enough support for an agreement that involves significant concessions? In any case of protracted conflict, these questions

will have no ready answers, but the embedded assumptions of the conflict will heavily affect how these questions are interpreted, evaluated, and answered. Certain risk-reduction techniques and third-party guarantees may mitigate against negative answers to these questions—negative answers are likely in the early stages of any peace process—but such techniques and guarantees are themselves imperfect. Indeed, they may slow a process down at the point where it most needs to provide evidence that the peace is worth preserving.

The tendency to answer such questions negatively while undergoing a peace process helps to explain why apparently sensible compromises are often rejected and why the possibility of a compromise peace is often seen as a third-best option to some future outright victory or a familiar but bearable status quo, especially among elites living in relatively comfortable exile. In effect, war can become “domesticated”—that is, people learn to live with it. This normalization is facilitated—as the Sudanese case illustrates—by “the insulation of the country’s elites . . . from the cruel havoc . . . wreaked on millions of ordinary people.”¹ Additionally, in some cases, certain constituencies may benefit more from the continuation of the conflict than from its resolution.²

Although the Oslo peace process was a failure, it did have a number of (potentially) redeeming features that can be built on by future peacemakers. In particular, certain leaders and segments of the public on both sides recognized that there was a preferable alternative to a bitter—and deteriorating—stalemate, that the historical problem of two people claiming a single territory could only be resolved through the equitable division of territory, and that working out the terms of this division and establishing new rules for peaceful coexistence were the central tasks of the peace process. While such progression fell well short of “breaking the genetic code” of the conflict, to borrow the words of Moshe Ma’oz, Oslo did lay down footprints for later negotiators to follow—even if they insist that Oslo’s only useful lessons are about what not to do.³ Either way, the Oslo experience will have shaped perceptions of what can and should be done in the future—and many of the tacit and explicit agreements reached during the Oslo years will affect the substance and atmosphere of any future negotiation. The Oslo peace process may have suffered an ignominious death but the lessons of that demise are still relevant—if frequently ignored.

OSLO'S DEMISE: THE SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING

Three general factors are frequently cited as having been primarily responsible for Oslo's demise.⁴ The first concerns deficiencies in Oslo's terms. For example, Henry Siegman has argued that Oslo—and the current “road map”—suffered from a failure to spell out in detail what the Palestinians would get at the end of the process if they implemented their own promises effectively, thus reducing their incentive to comply in the earlier stages.⁵ By implication, therefore, the negotiators missed a unique opportunity to reach a much stronger agreement that would have generated greater willingness on both sides to comply with its terms.

However, specifying details about core issues from the start would have destroyed the peace process before it even began and would have generated immense domestic opposition on both sides. Oslo was not a peace *settlement* but rather an exploratory truce that seemed to offer some hope of gradually changing the psychological environment of the conflict and opening, if tentatively, a new set of opportunities to move forward on substantive issues. However, such opportunities were easily missed or misinterpreted by weak leaders, particularly because they were forced to make decisions in a dangerous and uncertain environment. In this sense, Oslo was not intrinsically a “bad” peace doomed to fail or a “good” peace that guaranteed each side would attain enough of its central goals to make implementation increasingly likely. Rather, it was an imperfect product of its times, the most that could be gotten at that particular stage of a bitter protracted conflict.

The second factor that led to Oslo's demise involved escalating and reciprocal failures of implementation. With inevitable uncertainties about the shape of a final agreement and pervasive distrust, neither side was willing to take great risks for peace and each side demanded that the other prove its good faith before making major concessions of its own. This was a recipe for disaster, not least because neither side made plans to deal with the inevitable failures to implement. Stricter compliance mechanisms might have helped, but they were not included in the accords, perhaps because the negotiators were so enthused about what they had accomplished that they ignored how problematic implementation was likely to be. Both sets of negotiators may have also believed that Arafat would never accept strong commitments on compliance. While failures to implement surely contributed to Oslo's rapid decline, this explanation does not account for why such failures became endemic to the process and sheds little light on the underlying cause.

The third—and perhaps the most important and widely cited—factor that contributed to Oslo's failure involved the impact of domestic politics on the process. While leaders are central to the negotiation process and make key decisions, public support is critical for deepening and sustaining any agreement. But what leaders and their associates expect or get from an agreement may be very different from what the public expects or gets. In the case of Oslo, the public did not see any immediate, substantial, or widespread benefits from the agreement

and, therefore, was reluctant to bestow legitimacy on it. Each side also tended to see the other as being more unitary and monolithic than it actually was and thus did not seek potential allies on the other side, missing certain opportunities. As a result, sharp and escalating internal conflicts and declining popular support for the peace process made its collapse practically inevitable.

Central to each of the above factors is the decision-making style of the leaders themselves. Leaders weakened by a failure to produce substantive gains, to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion, and to deal with threats—real or imagined—of revolt by coalition partners, see deep risks in every decision they make. As a result, they often adopt a decision-making style that I call “negative satisficing.”⁶ Specifically, weak or weakened leaders begin to make last-minute decisions, fudged as much as possible, that offend the least number of actors who have the power to do them harm. Therefore, in negotiating a risky peace with an enemy that cannot be trusted, leaders often decide by deciding as little as possible. Indeed, from the perspective of Israel and the United States, Oslo failed largely because Arafat was incapable of or unwilling to make peace, perhaps because he could not deal with the prospect of having his rhetoric of ultimate triumph thrown back into his face. If true, his death should open new possibilities of reviving the peace process—and there are tentative signs that it has done so. But one must not jump too quickly to the conclusion that the major obstacle to peace has now been eliminated or, conversely, that nothing much has really changed. To understand some of the complexities of the current situation, one must first understand Arafat’s vices and virtues as a leader.

Arafat: The Enigmas of Leaders

Neither Arafat’s limitations as a leader nor the weaknesses of Palestinian institutions were the sole domestic problems impeding implementation of the accords. The weak coalition governments of Israel also made progress difficult, focusing the leaders’ attention on internal negotiations to stay in power and generating doubts in the Palestinian community about the credibility of Israeli promises. These doubts only grew when Likud leaders asserted that they would not be bound by Oslo’s principles should they return to power. In addition, Israeli society was split almost evenly between factions opposing and supporting the peace process, especially after violence surged during the Peres-Netanyahu election campaign. This made it very difficult for any leader to assemble a strong constituency for peace. However, I choose to focus on Arafat’s role in the failure of Oslo because he was in power throughout the process and because he alone could decide whether to support or undermine Oslo’s principles. Further, his decision to support the use of violence, his refusal to oppose Palestinian terrorist groups in a serious manner, and his illegal importation of arms directly threatened the process and destroyed the peace movement in Israel.

Arafat’s leadership has been severely criticized not only by Israel and American sources but also by some leading Palestinian and Arab sources.⁷ Dennis Ross, the former U.S. Middle East negotiator, has been particularly unflattering, as has been Bill Clinton.⁸ The picture that

emerges is of a leader firmly looking backward, unable or unwilling to make decisions that might generate internal dissent, and unable to adapt or learn in response to new opportunities. Why then did he accept the Oslo Accords, which did not guarantee the achievement of any Palestinian goals, but refuse to accept the flawed but much more promising Clinton-Barak offers at and after Camp David? Presumably he accepted Oslo because it provided him with real resources, such as foreign aid, international recognition as *the* leader of the Palestinians, and access to the White House, and gave him some breathing room at a moment when his power and standing were being challenged, without requiring the relinquishment of any central goals. Conversely, he rejected the Clinton-Barak offers—which included potentially significant concessions by Israel—because accepting them would have required a much more open sacrifice of some critical goals and would have generated much more domestic opposition among Palestinians. In short, Oslo's low-risk/low-gain strategy was more acceptable than Camp David's high-risk/high-gain strategy to a risk-averse, suspicious, and reluctant decision maker. To be fair, Arafat never had a strong hand to play and was never in complete control of all the Palestinian groups. Thus, while some of his actions may have appeared irrational to external observers, they may in fact have been rational and prudent in the context of his desire to remain in power and to avoid overt challenges to Palestinian unity.

A more malign interpretation of Arafat's behavior argues that he was never serious about the peace process and lied about his intentions from the day the accords were signed. Such motives are suggested in the comments of one experienced Palestinian journalist, who noted, "Arafat always described the Oslo process as the rape of the PLO. . . . He always presented the agreements . . . to his people as at best a short-term truce."⁹ This interpretation also seems to explain some decisions by Arafat—and the Palestinian Authority—that otherwise seem perverse. These include his continued rhetoric to his people that the "jihad continues"; his refusal to stop his media from spewing out anti-Semitic propaganda, to change school textbooks that did not recognize Israel's right to exist, and to confront any of the Palestinian terrorist organizations; his indifference toward the inept performance of the authority under his control; his illegal creation of multiple security forces as a nascent army; and his illegal importation of vast amounts of arms. Such actions are not designed to build a constituency for peace or to convince the enemy that a real commitment to peace has been made.

There is a revisionist school that justifies Arafat's failure to accept Clinton's "final" offer in January 2001 and that instead blames Ross, Clinton, and Ehud Barak for not offering more and for being vague on details.¹⁰ However, such criticisms seem tendentious and insufficiently contextual. For example, proponents of this school ignore Arafat's pattern of behavior after Oslo, they ignore the fact that *no* agreement at that time was going to be anything but imperfect, and they seem so concerned to point out its flaws that they forget that what was on the table offered the Palestinians far more than any previous—or subsequent—offer. Further, accepting the agreement would have kept the negotiating process alive and potentially made it even more productive. Did resorting to a brutal and immoral strategy of indiscriminate terrorism produce more for the Palestinian people? What better alternative do the revisionist critics have in mind, particularly given the constraints set by Oslo's failure and the declining domestic support for the peace process in both camps? Because the revisionist critics do not

provide meaningful answers to these questions—or offer a superior and politically feasible alternative to what was offered at Camp David—their indictment is not convincing.

However, the very image of Arafat with a clear strategy of manipulating Oslo to prepare for the resumption of conflict is not entirely persuasive and does not fit very well with his image as a cautious, reactive, and indecisive leader whose vision was entirely tactical and who decided most things by not deciding. He was also never a dictator who could impose his views by fiat, and he seemed to value unity, even superficial unity, over what seemed likely to be the small gains of the peace process. Yet, despite the limitations of his power and his own limitations as a leader, he can be fairly blamed for a number of things: he failed to anticipate the consequences of his actions and inaction; he deliberately launched a vicious terrorist campaign that hurt Israelis but hurt his own people far more; he played into the hands of the Israeli right-wing; he largely destroyed the Israeli peace movement; and he did not understand that he needed to stabilize and to deepen the peace process before trying to take advantage of it.

As a result, this combination of weak leadership, a flawed peace agreement, and pervasive distrust generated a race to the bottom of the peace process: prudent actions to lower risks and delay commitments on crucial issues created a downward cycle that neither could nor would be arrested. It is important to understand, however, that even stronger and wiser leaders may have become trapped in this cycle because both sides suffered from what I call “conflict syndrome.” Specifically, deeply embedded beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes affected how policy was set and how decisions were made. This syndrome is likely to continue to affect the post-Arafat negotiating process, although *perhaps* with less power. It is also important to remember that, despite Arafat’s deficiencies as a leader, he had two very important characteristics that may be sorely missed in the near term: he managed to keep a fractious Palestinian community more or less unified, and he and only he had the standing to impose a compromise agreement on his community—if, a big if, he had the will to do so.

THE INTRINSIC NATURE OF PEACEMAKING IN PROTRACTED CONFLICTS

Expectations about what peace or a peace process will bring are crucial to its survival. Therefore, incorrect and inflated—or deflated—expectations about what Oslo would produce are a major reason why it failed. At least some of the errors of the past decade could have been avoided and some of the individuals or groups on both sides intent on destroying the peace could have been thwarted if both sides had more clearly understood what to expect from Oslo and what kind of policies they needed to pursue to give Oslo a better chance of becoming a step toward peace, not a step backward. In effect, while the complexity of the issues on the negotiating table, the limitations of the accords themselves, and domestic political constraints all contributed to Oslo's failure, how each side thought about and conceptualized the peace process and what they expected from it may have been the determining factor in its demise.

Although Arafat may have been an incompetent leader blundering from one disaster to another, and Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon may have been deliberately trying to undermine a peace process they did not believe in, the cognitive framework that they each took for granted made it very difficult for them to make better decisions and stronger commitments to the peace process. Such an argument also provides a different perspective on the controversial issue of why Arafat turned down Clinton's final offer in January 2001. Specifically, Arafat may not have turned down the offer *solely* because of the ostensible inadequacies of its terms but also—if not largely—because of the attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that he had developed over decades of bitter conflict. These beliefs, in turn, predisposed him to see only traps, deceit, risks, and losses. Please note that this is not a deterministic theory: there are too many factors in play and too many uncertainties to allow for precise predictions.¹¹ However, the concept of conflict syndrome offers insight into how such peace processes are likely to evolve and what ought to be done to help a fragile peace survive and deepen.

This syndrome—or cognitive framework—not only leads to actions and policies that intensify conflict but also makes the halting or reversing of a downward cycle of violence exceptionally difficult once begun. In the abstract, one might reasonably conclude that such a downward cycle ought not to occur. After all, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the political, economic, and psychological costs have been monumental and obvious to both sides, and the desire on both sides to live a normal life is pervasive. Further, compromise is not unthinkable to shifting majorities on either side: the outlines of a two-state solution are well known and various official and unofficial negotiations have gotten close to reaching bearable compromises on even the most controversial issues. Why then do we now seem even further from agreement? John Darby has asked and answered the same question in regard to Northern Ireland: "So why has the crisis in Northern Ireland not been resolved, either with a compromise settlement or genocidal carnage? The answer is simple. There has been no

resolution because the violence has not been intolerable. By whatever calculus communities compute their interests, the price of compromise is still thought to be greater than the cost of violence."¹²

My answer, however, is quite different. Nothing in the process of trying to end a bitter, protracted conflict is quite that simple or quite that amenable to rational calculation of costs and benefits—if such are indeed “computable” by weakened leaders in a complex environment of choice. Even if the costs of violence exceed the costs of compromise in the minds of the leadership and some followers—perhaps even among a majority—stable peace may still be unachievable. There are a variety of reasons for this: those who lose from peace will resist it; leaders may be primarily concerned with staying in power and thus reluctant to risk internal dissent; peace may not resolve or significantly diminish some of the underlying problems that drive the conflict; and—as just noted—mind-sets ingrained after decades of conflict may still persist even after a nominal peace has been negotiated.

All conflicts are to some extent socially constructed. Therefore, more is at stake than resolving a clash of interests or even enlarging the joint benefits of peace: each side needs to alter the way it thinks about the conflict and its future relationship with the opposing side. I will examine certain aspects of this conflict syndrome, but it should be noted that the following discussion is somewhat stylized. The below elements apply to the Israeli-Palestinian case very well most of the time for most of the participants, while they apply to other cases more or less well—and yet others only loosely.

Primary Aspects of Conflict Syndrome

Oslo was really an exploratory truce that would have led to stable peace only if the leaders had understood the nature of the task they confronted, worked to develop public and cognitive legitimacy for an agreement that was largely procedural and incremental, and managed to contain and marginalize extremists. Oslo, like the Dayton Agreement on Bosnia or the Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland, largely left all the central issues unresolved. In such agreements, risks and uncertainties are so high that one cannot expect either side to make a full commitment to them: initial offers are likely to be hedged and minimal; doubts about the other’s willingness or ability to offer more or to implement commitments are generally great; each side has reasonable fears about the other side’s ability to get a substantive agreement through domestic political processes; and both sides are ultimately unhappy about the terms of any agreement and constantly seek to push its limits, renegotiate its terms, and get the other to move first. The parties to the conflict, in effect, seek to use the peace process for their own ends; actually achieving real peace may not rank very high on their list of priorities. Further, the agreements themselves may be open-ended and masterpieces of ambiguity and imprecision. This may be necessary to get the parties to sign an initial agreement, but ultimately this lack of clarity and precision may make it difficult to deepen and legitimize the peace process. Moreover, such agreements may also lack a self-correcting mechanism that can restore equilibrium and arrest a cycle of retaliation and revenge. These problems are

compounded by the fact that such negotiations are obviously intensely political for both sides and directly affect the fate of the current leadership and real or potential opponents.

Most protracted conflicts reach a stage where both sides believe no solution is possible. For example, a U.S. official speaking at the height of the Bosnian conflict noted, “I don’t think there is a solution to it. It’s becoming clear that the Bosnian war simply has to be managed. We have to try to keep the violence at a tolerable level. This approach does not come easy because we, as Americans, are used to solving problems. But this one is insoluble.”¹³ Political scientists have made similar claims with regard to other conflicts. Sumit Ganguly has said of the conflict in Kashmir that it has seemed “impervious to resolution,” and Richard Rose made the same point about Northern Ireland some years ago.¹⁴ Additionally, Bernard Crick proclaimed in 1989 that the conflicts in South Africa, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland were equally insoluble because no internal solution could satisfy the announced principles of either side and because an externally imposed or enforced solution would only strengthen the desperation of extremist groups.¹⁵ More recently, some have so despaired of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that they have advocated an externally imposed solution or argued that the conflict can only be “managed” and not resolved.¹⁶ After so many failed attempts at resolution, these views are hardly surprising, but they also tend to affect the pattern of expectations around any tentative peace agreement. How can any agreement that resolves so little and requires the cooperation of an untrustworthy enemy overcome the anticipation of failure?

The absence of empathy is an additional element of the conflict syndrome that is often ignored or undervalued. Defined as a demonstration of an accurate and nonjudgmental understanding of the other’s needs, interests, and perspectives, empathy is a learned characteristic;¹⁷ it is virtually impossible to learn it in an environment of hatred and bitterness, where each side seeks to inflict pain on the “devilish” other. There is rarely an effort to try to see the world through the eyes of the other or to try to show the other that you understand what he is saying even if you do not agree with it. An expression of empathy—particularly if it is perceived as credible and sincere by the other—is valuable because empathy is the basis of most moral judgments: it may begin the process of diminishing distrust, and it may begin a useful process of communication, as distinct from an exchange of rhetorical barrages. In its absence, therefore, demonization of the other persists, distrust deepens, and exchanges are superficial and sometimes cynical or hypocritical—consider Arafat’s expression of disapproval of terrorist actions that he himself had condoned or ordered. As a result, discussions about bringing an end to the violence usually revolve around its tactical costs—often concerns such as “it is losing us support” are voiced—and not about the moral evil of deliberately murdering innocent citizens of the other. This also has a practical consequence: one side always fears that the other will return to violence if it does not get its way, which implicitly implies that peace itself is only a tactic.

A related element of the syndrome is the sense of humiliation, loss of pride, and loss of face—especially among the weaker side—that deepens and sustains the desire for revenge and for recapturing past glories.¹⁸ This, and the tendency of each side to construct biased and

one-sided historical narratives that are taken on faith and are sometimes impervious to rational argument, leads to the embedding of distrust into the warp and woof of the conflict itself. Attempts by revisionist historians—usually only on the more powerful side—to construct a less tendentious and less emotional story also contribute to suspicion and doubt between the sides. The dangers of this are exacerbated by the tendency of each side to parse the other's rhetoric literally and to ignore the need to situate it contextually in terms of domestic or other needs and pressures.

One general implication of this argument is that reluctant and tentative commitment to a low-risk/low-gain strategy is intrinsic to the endgame of protracted conflict. Perhaps even the notion of an endgame is misleading because the game will go on for many years and notions of a "last" negotiation are dangerously naive. Generosity will be limited, demands to dot every "i" and cross every "t" will be pervasive, fighting over every inch of territory or every symbolic concession will be nasty, and leaders will be under pressure to display toughness and to rationalize why they say one thing to one audience and something else to another. Fearing failure, leaders will also try to protect against risk to themselves and to the peace process, in that order. Moreover, as demands increase because of rising costs—and perhaps premature euphoria—and if or as these demands are not met, attitudes will more likely be shaped by unattained aspirations than by whatever real, positive achievements may have been registered: the glass will thus always seem half-empty and progress, if it has been achieved, will be undervalued. Such a peace process is in trouble from the start. Merely keeping it alive will require strong leadership, substantial external support, the absence of negative shocks, such as the assassination of a leader, and a good bit of luck. In effect, the peace process will itself be little more than conflict by other means and will persist only as long as its immediate benefits exceed its costs and no important sacrifices have to be made.

In such an environment, leaders will fear appearing weak or losing face, especially those who have themselves been weakened and are confronting challenges from domestic opponents. These fears will make it difficult—if not impossible—for a leader to back down or to compromise, thus thrusting the need to do so on the other side. Fear here will not be a spur to innovative thinking but, rather, a spur to rigidity, conspiratorial thinking, and perhaps even excessive personalization of the conflict. Max Frankel, in a recent book on the Cuban missile crisis, notes, "For the roots of crises, look to powerful men feeling vulnerable and underestimated. Their dread of weakness, even imagined frailty, begets belligerence."¹⁹ Frankel later illustrates this point by describing President John F. Kennedy's reaction to Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev in the lead up to the crisis, in which he reportedly said, "[Krushchev] can't do that to me"—that is, place Soviet missiles in Cuba.²⁰ Such fear-based belligerence may have had something to do with the IRA's long-standing refusal to disarm, and it may have been *part* of the reason Arafat never made a serious effort to control various terrorist groups. These attitudes are not exclusively limited to the weaker side—both sides can be fearful and insecure—but they are presumably more prevalent in the side that is or sees itself as weaker and thus more vulnerable.

Therefore, the stop-and-go, off-and-on, crisis-driven negotiating process that developed after Oslo—and other such agreements, *mutatis mutandis*—was not simply the result of flawed leadership, bad draftsmanship, and unpredictable political events. Rather, this kind of erratic and unstable peace process was unavoidable: one should not be surprised that leaders will not take risks—*why should they?*—and that they act with mental reservations and a readiness to pull back quickly. Architects of future agreements must *anticipate and prepare for* a process that loses momentum, that is dominated by last-minute decisions on the edge of an abyss, and that staggers inconsistently from one crisis to another. They must also understand that reciprocal fears of cheating will be widespread, that cheating before being cheated will be the (apparently) prudent default strategy on both sides, and that the race downward will be far more likely to accelerate than decelerate.

As noted earlier, policymaking in this context is likely to become a form of “deciding by not deciding” or, more generally, of “negative satisficing.” The primary focus may well be on containing domestic opposition and pacifying external supporters rather than on making peace with the enemy—which may in some ways be less of a threat to the leader. Leaps of faith into a brave new world are likely to seem bearable only to strong leaders very sure of their domestic base—and external critics and analysts who value peace above all other virtues and who do not have to run the risks of betting on the wrong horse. Moreover, as conditions deteriorate and human and material losses mount, both sides may return to an existential phase of the conflict and begin to inflict pain and retribution on the other no matter the damage to the prospects for peace. Issues that could or should be treated dispassionately will be treated as symbolic, make-or-break demands—such as the right of return. Additionally, the process will be fueled by the leaders’ absence of empathy for the other and their need to manipulate issues to rationalize their own failures.

Other Aspects of Conflict Syndrome

In situations where conflict syndrome is firmly rooted, traditional bargaining strategies are unlikely to work well because of the difficulties of working out pragmatic trade-offs on emotionally fraught symbolic issues. An intensely competitive form of distributional bargaining is likely to develop, meaning asymmetrical benefits in favor of the weaker side in the early stages of the process may be very difficult to negotiate. Additionally, fear of being duped will hinder the needed cooperation for a successful peace process, and so too will the presence of a perverse form of reciprocity: returning good for good will be inhibited by doubts about the “good,” leading the exchange of bad for bad to become the norm. With an anticipation of failure, the ability to encourage cooperation through repeated games may also well be lost. Thus, interest in long-term cooperation between the two sides will be limited, particularly without reliable information about the other’s intentions and actions.

Another factor that may inhibit both cooperation and the implementation of an agreement is that there may be a large gap between the intentions of the negotiators and the intentions of the people on the ground who have to carry out agreed policies in daily encounters with

the citizens or officials of the other side. Specifically, the people who interact at this level, such as border guards, employers, and security personnel, may be reluctant to cooperate or change familiar patterns of interaction. The result is not only a failure to cooperate effectively but also an increase in hostility.

Traditional negotiating strategies will also be problematic because negotiating away ingrained patterns of thought and action is almost impossible, although some paths may be established at this stage that begin the process of “unlearning” what has “stood to reason” for so long. In addition, some of the standard negotiating lessons that have been extrapolated from other arenas—for example, environmental or trade negotiations—are not easily applicable in the context of bitter and protracted violent conflicts. Commonsensical notions that treaties must be self-enforcing—that is, each party must see a clear interest in implementing it—and must contain incentives to alter self-interested patterns of behavior do not work well in protracted conflicts: agreements such as Oslo are not self-enforcing because each side assumes the other will cheat and therefore decides it must cheat first. As a result, incentives to comply are weaker than incentives to fake compliance.

This model of protracted conflict reflects not only the social-psychological notion of entrapment but also cognitive notions about how to conceptualize protracted conflicts and policy notions about what can or cannot be done at any stage of a peace process. The entrapment model argues that decision makers sometimes pursue bad courses of action to justify or rationalize costly prior commitments that have not produced promised results.²¹ Thus, they may become overinvested in counterproductive initiatives to deflect charges that sacrifices have been in vain. This model helps to explain why demands increase and tactics harden as costs go up and the need for compromise becomes ever more apparent, particularly to those outside the inner circle of decision makers, who suffer from “incestuous amplification.” Fear of losing face and admitting fundamental errors of judgment are also crucial in entrapment, which means that the rationalization of past mistakes often plays a larger role in decision making than rational analysis. Getting out of such a psychological—and political—trap is obviously difficult, especially with weak leaders, since taking a longer-term perspective on current policy decisions or changing cognitive patterns of thinking is likely possible only if the leader can be shown clear benefits to and few risks for himself.

However, the entrapment model does not fully explain all aspects of the perpetuation of a conflict, since other domestic and external factors may be important, and the other side’s tactics may compel policy responses that deepen the conflict and make talk of an exit strategy an exercise in futility. For example, the “long-war” strategy of attrition adopted by many rebel organizations, in which they demonstrate a greater willingness to accept casualties and losses than their more dominant opponents, may force a government into policy responses that simply dig a deeper hole for each side. A sustained terrorist assault, as with the Palestinians during the al-Aqsa intifada, may also achieve the same end. Still, the entrapment model does provide a useful starting point for understanding why leaders choose courses of action that seem guaranteed to make a bad situation worse. Consider briefly Arafat’s support of a terrorist strategy that made peace less and less likely and Netanyahu’s and Sharon’s continued

support for settlement activity that isolates Israel, encourages terrorism, sharply divides Israel itself, and helps to foster anti-Semitism in Europe and the Muslim world.

Although this model of protracted conflict does anticipate bad faith, it also attempts to explain why some of the familiar techniques to reduce the risks of cheating are likely to work badly or fail to produce intended effects. The mere act of signing a peace agreement will not change the attitudes and beliefs that have sustained a conflict. Thus, after a fragile exploratory truce has been negotiated, new policies and patterns of thought will be needed to deepen the peace. Making commitments that are binding, credible, and irreversible—or at least seem so to the other side—will also be necessary. However, in some cases, simple and self-committing gestures, such as Egyptian president Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem, might even be rejected outright by the other side out of distrust.

When the negotiating process appears to have reached a dead end and the parties seem incapable of negotiating seriously with each other, there is inevitably a demand for third-party intervention, especially from the United States. Such intervention may indeed be useful or even necessary—as in Northern Ireland and Bosnia—since, as a vast literature has made clear, the third party may perform a variety of services that facilitate successful negotiations. However, caution is needed before advocating mediation or other forms of external intervention. At times, mediators may have interests of their own that could complicate the negotiating process, or they may not fully commit to the process, causing damage to it by abandoning it in a sensitive moment. Additionally, adaptive learning between the parties may be short-circuited and neither side may feel much ownership of a peace process that is at least partially imposed.

Perhaps an even bigger problem with third-party intervention is illustrated by this comment about Iraq by a UN official: “Iraq needs to be liberated—liberated from big plans. Every time people mentioned it in the last few years, it was to connect it to big ideas—the war against WMDs, solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, the war against terrorism, a model of democracy. That’s why all these mistakes are made. They’re made because Iraq is always, in someone’s mind, the first step to something else.”²² Similarly, Richard Bourke has said of the Good Friday Agreement that it was regularly represented as a stepping-stone “along the road to something better.”²³ Put simply, third parties may feel the need to view the resolution of a given conflict as a “first step” to justify a costly intervention or to pursue a deeply held ideological fantasy, but such attitudes may also mean that the particularity or density of a conflict may be ignored or misunderstood. As a result, sometimes parties to a conflict are better off trying to resolve it themselves. For example, successful peace negotiations in South Africa were carried out directly by the two sides with very little external intervention.

The Limits of Conflict Resolution

There is a curious theme in some of the literature on resolving protracted conflicts. For example, Bourke “calls into question the usefulness of the instruments we have devised for ending conflicts. . . . [These tools] encounter the unpredictable disposition of passion and

interest, of dissidence and vanity . . . [and thus] cannot consequently be rationalized into a technique."²⁴ Similar complaints have been made in both Sri Lanka and the Middle East about the usefulness of all the apparently commonsensical advice about, and approaches to, conflict resolution proffered by most would-be peacemakers. This raises an interesting question about why much of this material, which can appear perfectly reasonable on an analytic level, does not seem to work as well as anticipated in the "real" world of protracted conflict. One might argue that the literature often focuses on the wrong issues to begin with: it is not the clash of interests or the political constraints on leadership *by themselves* that explain success or failure. Such notions as the management of expectations, empathy, fear, distrust, and the equality of esteem also need to be taken into account. These abstractions, of course, are not on the negotiating table, at least not in any direct fashion. Often within the literature there is also an asymmetry between the search for usable generalizations across a large number of cases—a normal academic concern—and the need to account for the unique context and peculiarities of each particular case. There may also be a tacit or implicit notion among some students of conflict resolution that all right-thinking people would naturally prefer peace to war and compromise to the continued pursuit of likely unattainable goals. But the fighters have many goals and peace may not be the highest of such goals. The fighters may also work with different time horizons and different evaluations of costs and benefits, all of which make rational, interest-based analysis inherently problematic. Put differently, the clash of interests is real and consequential but conflicts are sustained and deepened over long periods because they are also socially—and psychologically—constructed. It is this dimension of conflict that must be dealt with if there is to be a serious hope of success in conflict amelioration, let alone resolution.

Finally, the set of assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that characterize the syndrome tends to generate a conflict analogous to a breeder nuclear reactor that creates its own fuel. Once begun, such conflicts create their own internal momentum as "grievance and counter-grievance make compromise more difficult and violence more cyclically intense."²⁵ The fire is hard to extinguish—to shift the metaphor—just as many underground coal mine fires are hard to extinguish, because it fuels itself through embedded, deeply felt, learned, and relearned "lessons of our history." A fragile peace agreement will hardly even begin to challenge these lessons, even though they pose a mortal threat to the survival of any agreement.

All Is Not Lost: Some Negotiating Successes

While Oslo made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict worse and peace less likely, peace processes in protracted conflicts are not doomed to failure. In fact, a few protracted conflicts have been successfully resolved and others have at least been diminished in effect for some period of time. In South Africa, for example, the two parties negotiated a reasonable compromise peace to a seemingly intractable conflict that granted the black community majority rule and the white community continued economic power and some temporary political power. The settlement was far from perfect and its implementation has been flawed, but it has persisted and remains better than the alternative of continued conflict. Why did this peace process

succeed, almost to the consternation of many experts? One answer is that the negotiators created a “peace culture” based on tolerance and jointly agreed-upon codes of conduct. More important, de Klerk and Mandela were in control of their domestic constituencies and committed to the notion of a compromise peace. In addition, a bottom-up revolt by the black population—along with the pressure of international sanctions—finally convinced the white community that continued resistance would eventually prove too costly and ultimately futile. A strong civil society had also developed over the years and it too became committed to the notion that peace was in everyone’s interest.²⁶ Unfortunately, in the Middle East, Arafat was not committed to the notion of a compromise peace, leadership on both sides was weak, and Arafat worked to undermine the civil society that had begun to develop in the West Bank and Gaza after the first intifada.²⁷

The Northern Ireland case also provides an interesting comparison to Arafat’s refusal to accept the less-than-perfect but still unprecedented Clinton-Barak offers. The Good Friday negotiations in 1998 presented the IRA and Sinn Fein with a final offer that gave them far less than they had sought and indeed less than they had already rejected in the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974. Why then did they accept it? While the end of the Cold War and Clinton’s active involvement played an important role in their decision, as did the realization within the IRA and Sinn Fein that a military stalemate existed, that they could make real gains from peace, and that demography was on their side,²⁸ these factors do not fully account for their acceptance of the agreement. What seems to me to be the dominant factor in the decision is that the IRA and Sinn Fein leadership, especially Gerry Adams, learned from the past and was able to adjust and adapt to new conditions and new opportunities—that is, even though the IRA lived by the gun for decades, Adams realized that you do not have to die by the gun if you prepare the way for change and are willing to take some internal risks for peace when an opportunity arises.

The peace process in Northern Ireland has since floundered, although even in its current uncertain state conditions on the ground for both communities are vastly better than they are in the Middle East. The Northern Ireland case illustrates, at least tentatively, that some of the worst effects of the conflict syndrome can be diminished by intelligent leadership, strong external support, and some willingness to learn from the mistakes of the past. It is very encouraging, for example, that the IRA acceptance of monitored disarmament in early October 2005 was followed a few weeks later by an announcement that two Protestant militias had agreed to end a violent feud and that one of the militias had ordered its gunmen to stand down—a potential move toward “taking the gun out of politics” both within and between the two sides. Caution is still imperative because of rampant criminality on both sides and because of continued suspicions and resistance by Protestant hard-liners, but progress toward peace, however fitfully, has clearly taken a step forward.

Conflict Syndrome and Doubts about Negotiations

Taken individually, the hallmarks of conflict syndrome are not unknown in conflict resolution literature: they have appeared and will continue to appear in discussions of protracted conflict.

Rather than being seen as discrete elements of a conflict, however, they must be taken as a whole, as a powerful syndrome that influences how each side sees itself and the other, what each side takes for granted about appropriate rules of behavior and normative standards, what attitudes and assumptions are embedded in the peace process, and what policies seem sensible or prudent. Thus, the syndrome affects not only long-term conflict resolution initiatives but also the very warp and woof of the negotiating process—if there is one—and the pattern of regular interaction. Most critically, the syndrome generates a peace process built on the anticipation of failure and an unwillingness to take large risks for peace, particularly if peace is perceived as merely a transitory stage, before the resumption of conflict, that is unlikely to produce large gains.

Dennis Ross has stressed that the failure to transform attitudes was one of the most important factors in Oslo's failure. He notes, "In the absence of transformed attitudes, mythologies were perpetuated, not challenged. Leveling with publics about compromise was avoided. The climate so necessary for rationalizing or explaining hard concessions was not created."²⁹ This argument is fully justified, but the argument herein goes well beyond the need to transform attitudes, as crucial as that surely is. Conflict syndrome also includes tacit and explicit assumptions about the nature of the conflict and patterns of belief about anticipated and appropriate behavior. As Ross's words suggest, we must understand in greater analytical depth the consequences of the syndrome so that its effects can be contained and confronted—especially, as the next section will make clear, in the early stages of a peace process.

This argument also implies that the management of expectations—a critical task for leaders—will be exceptionally difficult. Expectations affect how information is processed, what information is sought, and how parties interact. Negative expectations grow in intensity as conflicts deepen and reciprocal atrocities and rising costs begin to influence all calculations. This suggests that weak leaders may feel compelled to promise too much too quickly to overcome domestic resistance and to generate a constituency for peace, which means that disappointment and despair will rapidly undermine the peace process, especially one that is top-down and elite-driven. Conversely, if a leader deliberately keeps expectations low—both his own and the public's—there will be little change in patterns of behavior and a quick return to "conflict as usual." And the absence of empathy and each side's focus on its own victimization strongly increases the likelihood of missed signals and misperceptions.

Further, there is a kind of metaphysical doubt that shadows negotiations to end protracted conflicts, doubt that emerges from the syndrome's attitudes and assumptions. For example, if your experience with the other—and experience is the primary source of trust or distrust—is that the other has lied and not fulfilled commitments in the past, that the other has used earlier cease-fires to regroup and to prepare for the resumption of conflict, that the other consumes concessions as a preface to making new demands, and that the other often acts in bad faith, you may have legitimate fears and suspicions that the other will continue to act in such a manner. Such a dynamic has been at work not only in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process but also in negotiations between enemy groups all over the world. For example, just as Israelis were wary of Arafat's commitment to peace—and the Palestinians question the

real motives of Israeli leaders—so too have Protestants doubted the IRA's true intentions and Tamils distrusted the Sinhalese.

Why then join the negotiating process at all? If one gains benefits from a peace process but not from a compromise peace, or if one feels strong pressures from crucial allies or domestic proponents of peace, why not replace doubt and ambivalence about the possibilities for peace with outright cynicism, opportunism, and manipulation to gain tactical leverage? There is no single overarching answer to these questions: perhaps every leader or leadership group answers them according to some complex, shifting, and uncertain evaluation of the costs and benefits of either taking some real risks for peace—or, more likely, not taking them. Pressure and promises of support from needed domestic and external allies and bottom-up pressure from the grassroots who suffer from battle fatigue and who desire to lead a normal life are also a part of this complex calculus. Domestic pressure has seemed to have had positive effects—at least indirectly—in the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland and the Basque country, but not in the Middle East, where conditions are so desperate that hopes for peace have seemed a mirage.

Perhaps more critically, the leader may feel that the status quo is bad and likely to get worse and that it is better to run the risk of generating domestic dissent now rather than later or of dealing with the current leader of the opposition rather than with potentially more radical successors. Other factors may also diminish doubts among leaders about signing and implementing a risky agreement. For example, some failures to implement are to be expected at the start of any peace process because the terms of any initial agreement are likely to be ambiguous and each side will try to take advantage of these ambiguities. In turn, awareness among leaders that this is likely to happen will allay some fears and moderate against overreactions to certain instances of noncompliance by the opposing side. Therefore, nondecisive failures to implement should be noted but not stressed early in the post-agreement period. Additionally, as *nonimplementation* can cause a leader to lose a reputation—or not gain one—for trustworthiness, aware leaders may be less inclined to grossly violate an agreement, particularly for fear that his or her tarnished reputation may adversely affect any future negotiations. And, as there are a variety of techniques available to decrease vulnerability against the dangers of noncompliance, leaders may sign a preliminary agreement as a way to test the intentions of the other.

In short, even a peace process that one or both sides think is doomed to fail may generate a degree of political, economic, and psychic investment that might slowly accumulate into genuine support for peace. For example, even presumably untrustworthy leaders may come to enjoy a new status as a peacemaker, resource recipient, and legitimized spokesman for the cause. Or new leaders may emerge who protest the loss of earlier opportunities—as happened with the growth of internal opposition to Arafat among some young leaders. However, much will depend on the propensities of the leaders, the degree of risk they are willing to take, their judgment about the strength of the opposition, their assumptions about the future, and—above all—their alternatives to risking peace. Clearly, it is unlikely that any but the strongest leader will fully commit to a fragile and imperfect peace without fearful mental

reservations. Israel's peacemakers at Oslo may seem to refute this point because they were so optimistic about what they had achieved, but that very optimism, if not naivete, may have contributed to—but not caused—the ensuing disaster.

The Oslo Accords: Why They Failed

The belief that the Oslo Accords were a major step toward the final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now a "shattered dream."³⁰ Despite repeated official efforts to restart the peace process, despite apparently endless unofficial and semiofficial efforts by notables on both sides to work out the terms of a final agreement, despite the fact that the rough outlines of a compromise settlement that seems preferable to the status quo have been obvious for many years, despite the staggering and mounting costs of the conflict, and despite the widespread awareness that the conflict could get worse and make any settlement impossible, finding a path out of the swamp of despair and bitterness has proven too difficult for even the most dedicated of peacemakers, let alone the ambivalent and fearful peacemakers of the region itself. Indeed, the notion that the conflict has no solution is widely prevalent once again and self-styled realists insist that conflict management is the only prudent alternative. Oslo, with all its imperfections, deserved a better fate.

Why did this happen? Difficulties, delays, setbacks, misunderstandings, reluctant and tentative efforts to stumble forward, and other problems were inevitable. Agreements that resolve bitter, protracted conflicts are rarely going to offer an elegant progression into a brave new world of peace and reconciliation—or normalization, as the Israelis always hoped. But total failure and a peace process that made a return to an even more destructive conflict ever more likely were not inevitable. That level of failure is not attributable to a single cause. To fully understand why Oslo failed, we need to understand how the leaders and public alike came to conceptualize what to expect from the peace process, how the other was likely to behave, and how they themselves had to behave to protect their interests and advance their cause. From this perspective, what seemed to be a rational and sensible compromise in the eyes of outside analysts—and peacemakers—could also seem to be a high-risk venture into dangerous and uncharted territory to the parties involved. The status quo may have been bad, but it was rarely unbearably bad for leaders in safe exile, for those who benefited from the conflict, or indeed for ordinary citizens who adjusted to living within its constraints—even those set by an apparently endless stream of suicide bombers. Moreover, the dangers of the status quo were known and usually manageable.

While conflict syndrome was decidedly *not* the only factor that made progress toward stable peace so difficult, it did compound the negative effects of the other more widely cited factors for Oslo's failure. Although the costs of the conflict have been staggering and the outlines of a mutually beneficial—if also painful—agreement are apparent, the psychological and political constraints of the syndrome generated largely negative dynamics, creating and then exacerbating patterns of behavior that accelerated the race to the bottom. However, stronger and wiser leadership on both sides could have at least slowed the deterioration of the process

and—with cooperation between them—perhaps even gradually reversed the downward trend, thereby strengthening the peace. But, as fate would have it, the failure of leadership made the constraints of the conflict syndrome even worse, leading the process to end in a disastrous fashion.

4

RESURRECTING THE PEACE PROCESS: UNCERTAINTY AND HOPE

Despite the apparently mortal wounds that have been inflicted on the Oslo peace process, there are a number of astute and experienced analysts who insist that the peace process can be resurrected and that a mutually acceptable compromise peace is still within reach. These analysts tend to believe that the major obstacle to peace is the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the continued and badly disguised efforts to increase the size of key settlement blocs. They also believe that Arafat's successors and the Palestinian people will accept the two-state solution as definitive. The evidence for this is fourfold: (1) polls seem to show that roughly 70 percent of the Palestinian people now support a two-state solution and believe that they can live in peace with Israel after their own state has been established; (2) various unofficial negotiations have been successful in reaching agreement on even the most controversial issues on the negotiating agenda, such as the right of return; (3) a new leadership is gradually emerging within the Palestinian community that may ultimately replace the dispiriting and corrupt leadership of the past, although there are obvious conflicts over who can or will lead and in what direction; and (4) battle fatigue and a desperate desire to lead a normal life have begun to affect both communities, which may generate more support for at least thinking about the unthinkable—a compromise peace that will require some sacrifice of sacred goals on both sides.³¹ Some analysts also argue that even for Israelis who distrust the peace process, the idea of hunkering down behind the so-called security wall, which separates Israelis and Palestinians and encompasses many West Bank settlements, might seem less prudent than taking a risk on peace, especially given the new dangers of catastrophic terrorism and virulent Islamic fanaticism.

There are, however, some reasons for doubt and skepticism about reaching a compromise peace in the near term. For example, there are contrary polling numbers that suggest that a majority of Palestinians now want not only the land Israel captured after the 1967 war, but all of mandatory Palestine—that is, they want the destruction of Israel as soon as possible. In effect, in a familiar dialectic, the grievous losses the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority have suffered in the ongoing intifada seem to have increased demands for greater compensation and diminished any willingness to compromise for peace. The Palestinian community has also expressed massive support for the continuation of terrorism despite the fact that it has made most Israelis less willing to compromise and has generated widespread support for the construction of the aforementioned security wall, which in some areas intrudes beyond the 1967 boundaries into Palestinian territory, making compromise even more difficult. The wall may even generate sharp internal conflict in Israel if it fails to protect most settlements.³²

Equally troubling, even some Palestinians who are within the peace camp have clearly indicated that they will not recognize Israel's right to exist as a legitimate Middle Eastern state, a

denial that suggests any peace will only be regarded as a temporary stage in a continuing conflict. For example, moderates such as the late Faisal Husseini have occasionally made statements suggesting that the ultimate aim of the Palestinian movement is the destruction of Israel. Further, Hamas and other terrorist groups have consistently indicated that they will oppose any peace with Israel; their ability to undermine or even destroy a fragile peace process by continued atrocities that generate increasingly harsh retaliation by Israel is already evident. It is far from clear whether a renewed peace process would be able to withstand such actions and reactions. In addition, the new scale and magnitude of the terrorist threat, coming not only from the terrorists' willingness and potential ability to use weapons of mass destruction, but also from the increasing radicalization of parts of the Muslim world, suggest that Israel may have to employ policy responses that further alienate Palestinians and its neighbors.

A continued domestication or normalization of the conflict among Israelis and Palestinians also makes it less likely that a comprehensive peace will be possible in the near term. People adjust to the war, internalize its costs, and learn to live with it—as Israelis have learned to live with suicide bombers and Palestinians with socioeconomic deprivation, if with real costs in both cases. Pressures on the leadership to “do something” or to take risks for peace will diminish and, indeed, as the entrapment model implies, the pressure to increase the level of violence may escalate, if only to rationalize past expenditures in lives and resources. This means that the stalemate between the two sides will be hard to break and that keeping it from being a race to the bottom will be difficult, precisely because the stalemate is not unbearable. The closer the stalemate comes to being unbearable, however, the likelier it will be to generate demands for revenge and retaliation—no matter the costs. The creation of a security wall might help Israel to lower the threat of terrorism and thus to continue living with a nasty but bearable status quo, but other means of terrorism, pressure from abroad, and continuing economic decline may soon force Israel to recalculate its interests—and, one hopes, resume a peace process with new leaders on both sides.

However, even if a new agreement were to be negotiated that avoided some of the mistakes of the Oslo process—for example, by making much clearer what the Palestinians would get *from* the peace—and even if external powers promised massive and continuing amounts of aid and support, the Palestinian state that emerged *might* not be viable: providing jobs and other basic human needs for the citizens of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as those who return from the refugee camps, will be a massive undertaking. It will be especially difficult because the educational system has been hampered for some time by a lack of resources, a loss of schooling time, and an environment hardly conducive to the educational process. This may, of course, only be a transitional problem, given the talents of the Palestinian community, but it does imply the existence for some time of a cadre of young people still prone to destabilizing violence. If the new state begins to perform as badly as Arafat's Palestinian Authority, discontent will be quickly generated and the likely outcome could be a renewed demand to capture the land “between the Jordan and the sea.” While these negative considerations may be as unstable or ephemeral as the positive considerations suggested by the peace camp, they

should not be ignored in the wave of euphoria that will inevitably be generated by a new agreement, even one that seems to resolve the most contentious issues.

Still, however the pluses and minuses of these contrary views are calculated, even a tenuous agreement that might make matters worse in the short or medium term is a better gamble than persisting with the disastrously failed policies of the past. Such an initiative might break a futile stalemate that benefits neither side and might begin to break down the idea that the only solution is no solution until one side is strong enough to win. Put differently, the disasters and frustrations of the years since Oslo was negotiated have obviously made peace vastly more difficult to achieve, and this may not be a “ripe moment”—whatever that over-used phrase is taken to mean—to seek to restart the negotiating process. But peace desperately needs to be sought now not because it is a good alternative but because it is a better alternative than any other possibility—a perspective that recalls Churchill’s famous quip about democracy. Despite the pessimistic arguments just cited, nothing is written in stone, neither the arguments of the optimists nor those of the pessimists: leaders change, the views of allies evolve, some beneficial learning may go on even where it is not immediately apparent, and surprises and shocks that alter cognitive and political universes are always possible, if not probable. Even where conflict resolution remains a distant dream, conflict amelioration is always a possibility. Still, a note of caution is needed: a “bad” peace could raise expectations too high, could increase support for extremists if it failed, and could generate a moral hazard as the parties turn to other agendas. Awareness of these dangers may help to avert them—and help to focus attention on the need to deepen the peace process.

The Role of Third Parties

The episodic and inconsistent involvement of third parties in the Oslo peace process—bar the important but largely procedural involvement of the Norwegians—does not seem to have been a major or decisive factor in its demise. Even powerful third parties such as the United States cannot compel ambivalent and distrustful enemies to implement an agreement that is domestically divisive for both and that is inherently unclear about its final destination. But the situation has become so desperate and the belief that the Israelis and the Palestinians can themselves negotiate a way out of the conflict has sunk so low that some analysts have advocated leaping over the difficulties by imposing a solution from the “outside-in.”³³ However, third-party interventions generally tend to come too late and to be of limited value for a number of reasons: early warnings about the need for intervention are ambiguous; rallying domestic support for interventions that are costly and not clearly related to an immediate national interest is difficult; the need to intervene may clash with other interests; and the parties themselves may resent and resist unwanted interventions. As a result, “big bang” negotiations do not always end happily, especially when strong minorities bitterly oppose necessary concessions. The Dayton Agreement, for example, is still very tenuous; the conflict could quickly reignite if the peacekeeping forces were removed. There may also be a kind of moral hazard in assuming that only external intervention can resolve a conflict. It relieves the participants of the obligation to take some risks for peace or to explore ways out of the disaster that their

own policies have created—letting the “big guy” do it is too easy an option. Further, the failure of incremental peacemaking in the past hardly means that an imposed “big bang” negotiation will produce better results. In fact, given the persistence of old patterns of thought and behavior, a diktat could disintegrate even more rapidly than a slow, step-by-step peace process.

However, not all external interventions or cases of imposed peace are necessarily bad. There is some contrary evidence to suggest that external involvement can be useful in determining which demands should be compromised and which demands need not. Additionally, a third party (or parties) can provide useful political cover and substantial resource transfers at a critical point in the peace process. Nevertheless, external salvation is not a panacea and has not always been useful. As the economists are wont to say, it all depends. This is a universe of fuzzy logic and multidimensional patterns of causation—no single solution is likely to be uniformly adequate.

One final illustration from the peace process in Northern Ireland may be indicative of this point. The editors of *A Farewell to Arms?* note that Good Friday did not occur because of harmony or because each side saw discussion and compromise as better than violence and intransigence. Rather, they note,

It would be comforting to report that there had been a meeting of minds; that peace was the natural result of a rapid growth of that most valuable piece of scarce political real estate—the middle ground. . . . But it did not happen like that. . . . There was no Road to Damascus conversion to the other side’s point of view, no sudden outbreak of moderation, but a long and very painful, and as yet incomplete recognition that the old means of achieving desired ends would not work or were no longer acceptable to those upon whom the opposing camps depended for support.³⁴

The peace process was therefore bound to be lengthy because many felt it was either an illusion or a mere interlude in the conflict; in effect, it engendered as much hostility as enthusiasm on both sides. Once again, premature euphoria was likely to generate rapid disillusionment rather than rapid progress.

Setting Expectations

Establishing modest expectations for any new peace initiative, especially in its early stages, is a useful and perhaps necessary preface to efforts to break through the wall of suspicion, distrust, unresolved grievances, and an unfortunate but inevitable desire for revenge for earlier atrocities. But doing so does not answer the question of how to get out of the current stalemate. Many have argued that we should emphasize shared future interests in peace and common problems, that we should seek linkages and trade-offs to make painful concessions more bearable, that we should seek like-minded allies in the enemy camp, that we should

seek to enhance credibility by taking actions costly to ourselves (such as Sadat's visit to Jerusalem), that we should seek to put ourselves empathetically in the shoes of the other, or that we should extend each decision maker's time perspective so that the long-run benefits of peace become more relevant and consequential. From the same rationalist perspective, each side might also benefit from asking itself why it is participating in the peace process: if the answer is to seek a genuine peace, the appropriate policies and trade-offs are likely to be considerably different than if the answer is only to take advantage of a truce.

Unfortunately, while these are sensible and prudent suggestions, they are likely to be ignored or misused by would-be peacemakers who take the other's duplicity and hypocrisy for granted and are primarily driven by nonrational and subjective concerns. This implies that a successful Israeli-Palestinian peace process cannot focus only on resolving crucial issues through the usual trade-offs, reciprocal concessions, and adaptive learning. Initiatives that diminish prevailing patterns of thought and action and unstated fears and resentments must also be built into the peace process from the start, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable this may be for diplomats and negotiators.

A WAY FORWARD? OUTLINES OF A STRATEGY

It is not my intention here to attempt to lay out a fully articulated strategy to revive and sustain the peace process that began at Oslo. Nevertheless, a brief comment on a possible way forward does seem appropriate, especially one that reflects—and reflects upon—the central argument of this paper. I will begin by reemphasizing a few background points that a new peace strategy needs to keep clearly in mind. I should perhaps also note that the appropriate mind-set for this venture recalls a famous formula by Samuel Beckett: try again, fail again, fail better. Perhaps we might also add “try better” to Beckett’s list.

One critical point that emerges from my argument is that there is inevitably a bad fit between the constraints set by the conflict syndrome, especially ambivalent and inconsistent commitments to implementing principles that require substantial concessions, and the measures that need to be taken to increase the public legitimacy of the peace by proving to a suspicious and disheartened populace that peace is worth preserving. As a legion of conflict resolution analysts have argued for many years, the dispute needs to be transformed or redefined to break the stalemate that emerges from the reciprocal reiteration of grievances, the reciprocal exchange of atrocities, and the reciprocal and escalating failure to implement agreements.

How to do that, however, is rarely made very clear and most of the emphasis in the literature is on long-run changes. In contrast, immediate, salient, and felt changes in assumptions about the benefits that peace can or will produce are needed. Practically no peace process could withstand the endemic and escalating failures of the Oslo peace process, but neither could it withstand asking the leaders on both sides to take actions that directly threaten their power or place. One way to try to diminish the effects of this dilemma, which has no simple solution, is to make external support contingent on *initially private* leadership guarantees that actions which aggravate red flag issues will be avoided—such as continued support for terrorism and continued settlement activity. Serious failures to follow through on these guarantees should be immediately denounced and the peace process should be suspended until there are renewed guarantees of performance. Such onerous conditions may seem excessive in light of the constraints of conflict syndrome, but the peace will fail anyway without a real commitment to avoid actions that guarantee failure. The Middle East cannot afford another venture into peace as a charade or as an exercise in rhetorical gamesmanship. A window of opportunity for serious negotiations will only occur when leaders on both sides have come to recognize that a fragile peace will survive—and, one hopes, prosper—only if and when they are willing to make serious—if initially private—commitments about new patterns of behavior. Without such commitments, the peace process will flounder and will not to be saved by cynical allusions to the need for a “peace of the brave.”

In theory, a transformative process would focus on changing public attitudes, the definition of central issues, the rules by which the two sides carry on their conflict (for example, through a

cease-fire or a tacit agreement to end the use of violence for some period of time), and the underlying structures that have deepened the conflict over time, such as economic inequality, social separation, and inequities in treatment. Given the necessity of building a constituency for peace and legitimizing a top-down peace process, the initial emphasis must be on changing societal structures because they have the most immediate impact on the lives of ordinary people. Given the limited resources of the government and the massive needs of the Palestinian people, such an initial effort would obviously require significant support from the international community. This happened with the Oslo agreement, but the United States and the international aid agencies yielded much too easily to Arafat's demands for control over these resources. As a result, they were wasted on security-force salaries, an inefficient bureaucracy, and the illegal purchase of arms, and were otherwise lost through corruption. A new aid effort must be designed that maintains the usual standards of transparency and accountability and that does not yield to extortion—that is, give-me-the-money-or-there-will-be-chaos demands. Because Arafat received substantial sums without sufficient oversight, the Palestinian people did not benefit. They saw a disastrous decline in living standards—and chaos still ruled.

The initial policy focus thus must be on trying to drain the swamp before seeking to build on its very shaky foundations. Decades of failed efforts at development in the Middle East and elsewhere provide abundant proof that this task will never be fully or quickly accomplished. Nevertheless, there are useful things that can be done quickly and effectively, especially in meeting basic human needs and providing evidence to the long-suffering Palestinian people that their governing institutions will not be misused for personal gain and that these institutions will seek to meet public needs and to improve their performance. These tasks are exceptionally difficult, especially in the early stages of a peace process, but substantial empirical evidence suggests that initial public expectations are usually modest and realistic—in effect, a new governing authority has a honeymoon period to prove that it is something more than an old autocracy in a new disguise. However, while the structural elements of the conflict bear a large share of the responsibility for deepening and sustaining it, they are least amenable to quick solutions, which may be one reason why they are often ignored or underemphasized in the peace process. Thus, getting quick results will be dependent on external support that is both generous and carefully planned. And, through this support, the problems created by the need for quick and tangible results and the ambivalence of the parties about trusting the peace process will be diminished: the initially strong commitments will come from external parties and the benefits will be (relatively) quickly felt on the ground.

Since negotiations tend to begin because of leadership judgments about future developments, changes in the pattern of expectations are crucial. These changes reflect new interpretations of what the peace process can produce and what needs to be done at what point to improve the chances that the peace will begin to be perceived as intrinsically valuable and not merely as a new stage in the conflict. Success at this stage will be closely linked to the success of the initial aid effort. But attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors must also be changed. Unsurprisingly, new patterns of thought have been slow in coming and have been largely confined to tactical shifts about how to pursue traditional goals. But recent leadership changes, generational shifts, pressure from external allies, and shocks that precipitate the rethinking of conventional

wisdom—for example, judgments about the utility of terrorism after 9/11—may be accelerating new patterns of thought. Paul Pillar, a career CIA officer, has noted recently that “major policy changes tend to come only from actual disasters.”³⁵ As Oslo clearly qualifies as one, it should generate new patterns of thought, although they are—as yet—very hard to detect. Of course, there is no guarantee that new patterns will be entirely beneficial, but it seems unlikely that they will produce results that are more dysfunctional than existing patterns of thought. Seeking to manage expectations more effectively, or at least being aware of how important they can be, may help—if nothing else—to avert rapid oscillation between premature euphoria and deep despair and cynicism.

An effective multidimensional peace process that will continue for years—or decades if genuine reconciliation is the goal—cannot be built on the fly. One consistent failure, as I have already emphasized, not only in the Oslo process but also in a number of other peace processes, has been the lack of planning in the steps needed to build support for a very fragile peace, to maintain its momentum, to deal with the inevitable misunderstandings, setbacks, and failures, and to create institutions to facilitate cooperation and communication. Failure to do so usually reflects the persistence of old patterns of thought and the belief that the peace is only transitory. Why plan for a post-peace period when the conflict will resume? Even if planning has been undertaken, it will not accomplish much if leaders are indifferent or blinded by ideology or ignorance. But this sort of planning could become very valuable for leaders who do want to drive the peace process forward in a very inhospitable environment.

Gradually Accelerating Incrementalism

In effect, one needs a peace strategy for the Middle East that takes into account the contextual constraints of peacemaking in a protracted conflict, that is heavily aware of the need for very salient improvements on the ground as quickly as possible, that plans and prepares for inevitable failures and setbacks, and that is increasingly demanding in terms of implementation and compliance as the peace process begins to prove its worth. This is a peace process that is initially modest, flexible, and front-loaded, but ultimately ambitious, sustained, and committed. Such a peace process, which I call “gradually accelerating incrementalism,” differs from traditional incrementalism by establishing as early as possible—perhaps tacitly among leaders at the start—a mutually agreed-upon set of shared goals to be achieved in defined stages of the process. It would begin with a major effort by the international community—and Israel as the stronger party—to improve standards of living and quality of life for the Palestinian people and would focus on meeting basic human needs, such as health, sanitation, clean water, housing, and education. Commitments on implementation of proposals can be loose and permissive at this stage, but commitments not to violate tacit agreements on certain red flag issues must be firm—or the slide downward could accelerate once again. However, the leaders should not be asked at this stage to sacrifice central goals or to take actions that commit too early or preclude a quick retreat if such seems necessary. After all, the leaders may decide to explore a peace process, but this does not mean they want to do so at the risk of losing power or status.

Additionally, since there is a very strong need to begin strengthening the public legitimacy of peace as quickly as possible, efforts to contain or diminish corruption must commence immediately. Failure to do so was one of the major reasons why support for Oslo rapidly deteriorated in the Palestinian community: it was impossible to believe that a regime that was corrupt, brutal, and incompetent would produce major public benefits or deepen a fragile peace process. In the next stage, after some initial progress, there needs to be relatively flexible commitments to implement more of the principles and provisions of the peace agreement, but with both sides aware that support for the peace will still be tentative and that extremists will be increasingly desperate to destroy the peace process. This bears at least a rough resemblance to the difficulties that some Eastern European and developing countries faced in moving from discredited authoritarian regimes to relatively more democratic regimes amid resistance by the old guard and a disintegrating economy. The “politics of accommodation” that prevailed in many of these cases, in which some painful compromises were accepted to avoid a descent into civil war, may also be relevant in the present Israeli-Palestinian context. This is also a period in which cheating may be disproportionately dangerous because it confirms the other’s worst fears and accelerates reciprocal defections from commitments. One hopes, however, that success in the first phase will diminish such dangers and that careful monitoring without harsh sanctions will reduce incentives to cheat. Once progress has been achieved on these fronts, the process must turn to resolving the central issues of the conflict and to making increasingly firm commitments about implementation and deadlines. An independent and presumably unbiased panel should be tasked with monitoring these commitments and any violations of them should lead to serious sanctions. Since the concessions and compromises at this stage are more burdensome and dangerous to both sides, the threat of coercive and punishing sanctions for noncompliance may increase incentives to comply and to fulfill painful obligations.

Such a process would resemble the economic concept of a “cascade of information,” except that the cascade here is of small steps that accumulate into a sustained progression toward an agreed vision of peace. Any and all measures can be used in this pursuit, but it should be emphasized that changes in the rhetoric of mutual invective are imperative immediately—a point Arafat ignored, to his detriment. Such changes should be accompanied by an attempt to begin to alter educational practices aimed at vilifying and denying the legitimacy of the other. These are more than atmospherics because they provide crucial information about how serious one or both parties are about the peace process. Failure to pay attention to these issues during the Oslo years, whether deliberately or because of a lack of awareness of their importance, was crucial, not least because it generated or exacerbated Israeli fears that the Palestinians and larger Arab world would never accept Israel as a legitimate Middle Eastern state. (Similar educational failures have occurred in Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland.) As a result, the legitimacy of the peace process was always under threat and the fear that it was merely an interlude in the conflict affected attitudes and behaviors on both sides.

In beginning a new process, one might also think about reviving the old Cold War idea of GRIT—that is, graduated, unilateral, and reciprocal reductions in tension.³⁶ Such initiatives are designed to break a stalemate in which each side resists movement for fear of seeming weak.

Given persistent mistrust, initial steps may require third-party support or strong leadership from the more powerful side in the conflict. However, this perfectly reasonable image of reciprocal and unilateral concessions will not work well if one or both sides see concessions as a sign of weakness and if one or both leaders feel too weak to respond appropriately. And it will not work if one or both leaders are using the peace process only to prepare for renewed conflict or as a means of deflecting domestic discontent. If careful draftsmanship can allay some fears about conceding too much too soon, so too can an agreement not to press for too quick a resolution of the most difficult issues—or not to surrender any demands until there is a final agreement.

Finally, the obviously severe problems of generating and sustaining cooperation in these circumstances can be diminished not only by a variety of familiar techniques, such as side payments, recognition that the parties are in a continuing game, and hedging strategies to reduce risk, but also by joint recognition of the need to focus on “diffuse reciprocity.”³⁷ In such circumstances, the parties choose to cooperate because they hope to benefit over many years and many issues but not necessarily in every year or on every issue. It should be emphasized that the notion of diffuse reciprocity is likely to work best and to produce more joint benefits if the stronger party accepts the need to act first and to expect less in the initial period after a negotiation. Israeli governments, especially the right-wing administrations of Netanyahu and Sharon, failed miserably in this regard, raising justified suspicions about their commitment to the peace process. Northern Ireland offers a more positive illustration of the potential benefits of reciprocated unilateral actions: as noted, shortly after the IRA accepted the need to disarm, one of the main Protestant militias announced that it had ordered its gunmen to stand down. This may illustrate that leaders in Northern Ireland are more aware than those in Israel that domestic politics is not the only game in town: one also needs to respond to the actions of the other without perceiving them only as traps.

ALTERNATIVE ROADS TO PEACE

The approach to peace that I have outlined here stands in sharp contrast to two recent contributions to the debate over the direction future Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives might take. The first is reflected in an unofficial agreement negotiated by a group of Israeli and Palestinian political figures and intellectuals in Geneva, Switzerland, that was presented to the public in October 2003. The participants managed to reach agreement on many of the conflict's central issues, if with some ambiguity in places, but this effort ultimately disappeared as rapidly as so many prior attempts to break through the stalemate. One reason why it floundered is that none of the subjective elements of conflict syndrome were discussed, perhaps because addressing them requires a long-term peacemaking strategy—and not merely a peace of grand gestures. An even stronger reason for its failure was that this initiative got too far ahead of where the publics were—as yet—willing to go. Many on both sides stated that the other side could not be trusted to implement commitments. As I argue, the respective publics need to see the benefits of peace and to be *reeducated* in new beliefs and attitudes before any such agreement can survive and prosper. One might presume that the negotiators of this agreement, many of whom were involved in negotiating Oslo, would have painfully learned this lesson during the Oslo years, but apparently they had not. Moreover, if such an agreement were to begin to earn public support, it would require leaders committed to peace, to containing their own extremists, and to speaking the truth to their own people about the need to accept painful compromises and to alter ancient beliefs. One doubts that the current leadership on either side is willing or able to rise to such tasks.

Sharon has his own version of what he calls a “long-term interim agreement,” or standstill agreement, with the Palestinians. This involves unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, a limited Palestinian state in parts of the West Bank and all of Gaza, completion of the security wall between Israel and the Palestinian territories, and discussion of the central issues, such as Jerusalem and the right of return, only on some distant date.³⁸ This is a peace policy virtually guaranteed to sustain and deepen the conflict, especially if it goes hand in hand with an effort to expand the main settlement blocs in the West Bank, and is a testament to the unwillingness of the right wing in Israel to give up its hopes and delusions about the retention of territory. Israel is powerful, but its position is also precarious: its ability to contain the escalating threat of catastrophic terrorism may not go on for long, and its tendency to ignore the opinion of rising numbers of people—not all of whom can be dismissed as anti-Semites—who believe that Israel's policies are generating support for Islamic terrorism in their own countries may become increasingly costly. In Europe, for example, the media, intellectuals, and academics, especially those on the Left, continue to turn against Israel. In fact, many of them justify or rationalize violence against Israel while denouncing any Israeli retaliation as excessive or unjustified. As a result, Israel risks becoming even more of an international pariah with few friends. The attendant dangers and discomforts of being in such a state will surely rise.³⁹

After Arafat—Possibilities and Constraints

Arafat's death may create new opportunities for negotiation and new dangers for both Israelis and Palestinians. However, it does not change the analytical argument about why Oslo failed and what share of the responsibility for that failure should be attributed to Arafat himself. Nor does it change the underlying theoretical argument about the impact of conflict syndrome on how the conflict continues to deepen or why it is so difficult to resolve the conflict despite its ever-mounting costs and the fact that shifting majorities on both sides seem willing to risk peace. What his death does change is short-run calculations about what *may* become possible and what needs to be done on both sides to grasp new opportunities—which may arise not merely from his passing but also from the Bush administration's willingness to expend some political capital on the Middle East peace process.

Although Arafat is gone, the beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions on both sides that undermined the implementation of Oslo are still powerfully present and cannot be quickly altered. In addition, terrorist groups, both secular and religious, remain committed to Israel's destruction. The fact that they are seeking and may acquire more deadly arms raises the stakes considerably. However, there have been some tentative signs of moderation from Hamas. Whether such signs are related to its hope to benefit from the electoral process or are simply a tactical lull related to the threat of Israeli retaliation is unclear. Much will depend obviously on whether an effective peace process can be initiated, on how well a new Palestinian Authority performs, and on how effective it is in marginalizing extremists by altering the beliefs and behaviors that have made groups such as Hamas popular.

An upsurge in optimism over the possibility of a resumption of negotiations also reflects the obvious fact that Arafat's death removes at least part of the excuse that Israel and the United States had for largely ignoring the peace process or whatever was left of it—specifically, that Arafat had repeatedly failed to honor commitments or to do anything to stop terror. Unfortunately, as many commentators have been quick to note, his death does not remove the more general reason for Israel's refusal to negotiate: the absence, as yet, of a reliable partner who is able and willing to stop or at least limit the violence and who is willing to accept a two-state solution (on mutually agreed terms) as final. There are a variety of reasons to doubt that any such leader either can or will emerge any time soon. Arafat's success in putting the Palestinian cause on the international agenda is unquestioned, but, in retrospect, his record will be tarnished not only by what he did not do but also by his refusal to share power, to allow other leaders to emerge, and to prepare for an orderly succession.

The election of Mahmoud Abbas is potentially encouraging, but Abbas also lacks the power and perhaps the will to contain the extremists. Further, he probably lacks the status needed to make necessary concessions on symbolic issues that Arafat long manipulated to retain popular support, such as the right of return. Abbas's desire to incorporate extremist groups into the political process, rather than to attempt to crush them militarily, is undoubtedly a reflection of his own desire to avoid civil war and the general weakness and unreliability of his security forces. But neither Israel nor the United States have seemed willing to give him

the time and support needed to strengthen his hold on power. They also have failed to understand that making demands that are too risky for him to address will only lead to inconsistent policy responses that could potentially generate instability and perhaps chaos.

Moreover, Arafat maintained power by buying off dissent and avoiding decisions that would likely generate significant dissent. Now, with different groups wanting different things—not all of which are compatible—and with a strong likelihood of weak leadership emerging from the struggle to take over, the willingness of any leader to take large risks for a compromise peace is likely to be sharply constrained. This will be especially so if personal ambition trumps group needs and if Arafat's "old-boy network," desperately afraid of losing economic benefits, tries to retain power. In the worst of circumstances, internal violence could erupt until one strong leader emerges. Unless the Palestinians can remain united without Arafat's dominant presence, the short-run prospects for peace may actually deteriorate.

Much will also depend, of course, on the willingness of the Sharon government to make a more generous offer than anything it has been willing to put on the table in the past. The new Palestinian leadership will be in desperate need of substantive concessions from Israel—for example, on the release of prisoners, the turning over of tax resources, and the pulling of some troops from Palestinian areas—but it is far from clear that Sharon will be willing to offer more than cosmetic gestures or that the Israeli public—badly scarred by the terrorism of the Oslo years—will accept offering any more concessions until the Palestinians prove they are serious about peace. Needless to say, the Palestinians are unlikely to do so unless they receive significant benefits quickly. Nor is it clear that the Bush administration's brave words about its willingness to expend political capital on the Middle East peace process will survive the inevitable disappointments and frustrations of peacemaking or even protests from domestic supporters of Sharon's hard-line policies, such as Christian fundamentalist groups and some conservative Jewish organizations. Yet Sharon's successful withdrawal from Gaza and the less-than-feared reaction of the settlers might suggest that the old warrior wants to leave a mark as a peacemaker. It might further suggest that—if he can remain in power and maintain majority support in the Israeli electorate—he *might* risk even more in the future by ordering major withdrawals from the West Bank and a major confrontation with the settlers and their supporters.⁴⁰

The severe dilemmas confronting weak leaders in a complex and dangerous environment are major obstacles that impede progress toward an effective peace process. The greatest dangers to such leaders may reflect two linked factors: the failure to think contextually about the constraints of working within an environment created by decades of bitter conflict and pervasive distrust, and the consequent failure to abandon tactics and strategies that have failed so miserably in the past. Instead, failure is too easily attributed to the duplicity and bad faith of the other and change in "normal" patterns of interaction is resisted as being too risky. As a result, the guilt for past failures is shared. Thus, Israelis continue to make demands on the Palestinians that they know cannot or will not be fulfilled, such as confronting terrorist groups directly and forcefully. The dangers of doing so are simply too great for a weak Abbas regime that is unwilling to risk civil war and fearful of delegitimizing the electoral process before it

can prove its worth. However, such demands are obviously understandable from an Israeli domestic perspective: forestalling terrorist actions by groups dedicated to Israel's destruction is a prime purpose of the peace process. But asking for too much too soon merely indicates that Israeli policy has not adjusted to the singular needs of a very fragile peace process.

By the same token, the Palestinians continue to use the rhetoric of the Arafat years, continue to extol the heroism of the "martyrs," and continue to demand large concessions from the Israelis before there is sufficient evidence that the peace process can and will provide *mutual* benefits. Israel needs to act more generously and more quickly than it has yet done, but it is not sensible for the Palestinians to ignore the profound political and psychological damage created by repeated terrorist atrocities or Israel's own domestic constraints. In short, peace requires more than Arafat's departure. Both sides need to understand the complex and critical linkages and feedback between their own beliefs, needs, and actions, and the beliefs, needs, and actions of the other.

Conclusion: Short-Run Pessimism, Long-Run Hope

Only the very brave or the very foolish are willing to offer confident predictions about short-term prospects in the Middle East. Developments are still mostly driven by largely unpredictable events within the conflict itself, the region, and even the wider world. Such events could thrust the Israeli-Palestinian peace process to the top of the international agenda or onto the back burner—or some uncomfortable place between these extremes. The only certainty is that the problem itself will not disappear and will fester without sustained effort. Short-term forecasting is also bound to be unreliable because of one ancient social science axiom that continues to operate: every darn thing is related to every other darn thing. Multiple linkages and complex patterns of feedback guarantee high levels of risk and uncertainty. These considerations come together to suggest that short-term pessimism about a rapid breakthrough to peace in the post-Arafat years is probably justified. The transition to a new era in the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is likely to be rough and perhaps even traumatic if the Palestinians do not quickly resolve their domestic conflicts and the Israelis try to hang on to too much land in the West Bank. Nevertheless, longer-term prospects for peace are brighter because certain factors are pushing both sides—suspiciously and reluctantly—toward "thinking about the unthinkable." This presupposes, of course, a carefully planned peace process that receives generous and sustained external support and much wiser internal leadership. The fact that much has not changed after Arafat's death, and some things have indeed gotten worse, should not be used as a rationalization for doing nothing or arguing that failure is inevitable. Improvements that can slowly accumulate into significant change are always possible and small steps consistently implemented can produce large effects.

The need to institutionalize the peace process may be the least understood factor in successful peacemaking. The Israelis and Palestinians did create, especially after the Madrid Conference of 1991, a number of functional committees to discuss a variety of specific issues. Unfortunately, they never achieved much because of turmoil in the political and security arenas.

Something quite different is needed here—specifically, a high-level, well-staffed, and tripartite committee that is asked to try to avert or at least to diminish the effects of the inevitable crises, shocks, and misunderstandings that are likely to occur. Such an institution with a five- or seven-year mandate would not be a panacea, but it would offer a degree of hope that some of the worst crises can be contained, that some of the least anticipated surprises can be anticipated, and that the most destabilizing misunderstandings can be clarified. The habits of cooperation that this committee establishes could prove useful, as could the possibility of public exposure for cheating, but perhaps the most important *potential* benefit is that such an institution might forestall or certainly delay another race to the bottom.

Such an approach offers no quick solutions or guarantees of progress. It may also seem too slow and too modest for a conflict that always seems on the verge of an explosion. But all the grandiose efforts to impose solutions, to compel the parties to leap into the unknown, and to capitalize on the seemingly unending initiatives of various officials, former officials, and notable leaders to negotiate a stable peace have floundered. This is not surprising given the failure of such efforts to deal with or understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict syndrome. Perhaps, then, gradually accelerating incrementalism, which does recognize how far the peace process has to travel and does take account of the range of obstacles to progress, may offer some hope of arresting and ultimately breaking out of an apparently unstoppable race to the bottom. A focus on sustained conflict amelioration is obviously less heroic—no Nobel Peace Prizes, no ceremonies on the White House lawn—than a focus on conflict resolution, but it may provide the best long-run hope for peace.

NOTES

1. William Finnegan, "The Invisible War," *New Yorker*, January 25, 1999, 66.

2. See Finnegan, "The Invisible War," 70; for Sri Lanka see Robert L. Rothstein, *The Sri Lankan Peace Process: Lessons from the Middle East and Northern Ireland* (Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), 22–3.

3. For Moshe Ma'oz's comment, see his "The Oslo Peace Process: From Breakthrough to Breakdown," in *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process*, ed. Robert L. Rothstein, Moshe Ma'oz, and Khalil Shikaki (Sussex, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 146.

4. The Oslo peace process did not, of course, occur in a vacuum. It was preceded by many negotiations, large and small, official and unofficial, and it has been followed by many more such efforts. My concentration on Oslo is thus not intended to deny the importance of these other initiatives.

5. Henry Siegman, "A 'Map' without a Destination," *International Herald Tribune*, October 9, 2002.

6. Herbert Simon's well-known notion of "satisficing" implies choosing the first good enough option, but my adaptation of his idea rests on a strategy of avoidance and of choosing the least harmful option. See Herbert Simon, *Models of Bounded Rationality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 35–64.

7. Some of the most negative views have been summarized in Dilip Hiro, *Sharing the Promised Land—An Interwoven Tale of Israelis and Palestinians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 485. Negative views by the Saudi ambassador to the United States are quoted in Elsa Walsh, "The Prince," *New Yorker*, March 24, 2003, 58. Negative criticism within the Palestinian community is cited in Steven Erlanger, "Arafat Outfoxes His Political Foes—Again," *International Herald Tribune*, August 17, 2004.

8. See Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 338, 699, and 776; and Bill Clinton, *My Life* (London: Hutchinson, 2004), 943.

9. Quoted in David Horowitz, *Still Life with Bombers: Israel in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 116–17. The Palestinian journalist also notes that when Arafat saw that Israel had been forced out of Lebanon by twenty deaths a year, he decided he could do better than Oslo by launching a new and more violent intifada and by happily calling for a million "martyrs."

10. See, for example, Jerome Slater, "The Missing Pieces in *The Missing Peace*," *Tikkun* 20, no. 3 (2005): 22–25 and 58–61.

11. This concept is in the realm of pretheory, that is, of plausible hypotheses that might someday make a contribution to theory.

12. Quoted without attribution at the beginning of Paul Arthur, "The Anglo-Irish Peace Process: Obstacles to Peace," in Robert Rothstein, *After the Peace—Resistance and Reconciliation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 65.

13. Quoted in *New York Times*, April 16, 1995.

14. Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2. Rose is quoted in John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 354.

15. Quoted in Adrian Guelke, "'Comparatively Peaceful': South Africa, the Middle East and Northern Ireland," in *A Farewell to Arms? From 'Long War' to Long Peace in Northern Ireland*, ed. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 226. Ironically, within a few short years after Crick's negative forecast, a successful peace process was under way in South Africa, progress toward peace accelerated in Northern Ireland, and the Oslo Accords were negotiated—so, difficult yes, but "insoluble" maybe not.

16. Shlomo Ben-Ami, foreign minister under Barak, argues for an externally imposed settlement in "Bush's Mideast Opportunity," *New York Times*, April 5, 2002. Another argument for an imposed solution in a big bang negotiation is Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "The Last Negotiation: How to End the Middle East Peace Process," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 10–18. The title of this piece is absurd for there will be no "last" negotiation in the Middle East, big bang or not, and the "end" might be considerably different from the authors' pious hopes for an imposed settlement. See the comments by Tom Segev on management as the only remaining option in Roger Cohen, "Israel's Wall, a Victory for the Logic of War," *International Herald Tribune*, July 14, 2004.

17. There is a useful discussion of empathy in Robert Mnookin, Scott R. Peppet, and Adam S. Tulamello, *Beyond Winning: Negotiating to Create Value in Deals and Disputes* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2000), 46–7. For other illustrations of the absence of empathy, see Cohen, "Israel's Wall," 2, and Arthur, "The Anglo-Irish Peace Process," 75–84.

18. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 120 and 130, stresses the extent to which humiliation lasts longer than physical pain because the wounds of the former last much longer and because it "becomes constitutive of our sense of who we are."

19. Quoted in a review by Ben Macintyre, "Eyeball to Eyeball," *New York Times Book Review*, November 28, 2004, 9.

20. *Ibid.* Historian Peter Galison's description of the Cold War's "ontology of the enemy," in which each side saw the other as a "cold-blooded, machinelike opponent" who wanted only to win and whose every move reflected that goal, recalls my ideas on conflict syndrome. Cited in Louis Menand, "Fat Man," *New Yorker*, June 27, 2005, 97.

21. There is an excellent discussion of entrapment in Joel Brockner and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, *Entrapment in Escalating Conflict: A Social-Psychological Analysis* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985).

22. Quoted in George Packer, "Letter from Baghdad: War after the War," *New Yorker*, Nov. 24, 2003, 85.
23. Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 307.
24. *Ibid.*, 18.
25. Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Pan, 2003), 359. Michael Doran has noted that "In the Middle East, as in the Balkans and Ireland, suppressed religious and ethnic groups have a kind of film playing in their minds of their own oppression. In moments of political disruption, they are ready to add another scene to the pre-existing narrative." Quoted in Robert F. Worth, "In Iraq, a Tug of War over the Truth," *New York Times*, April 24, 2005.
26. I draw here on Patti Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997).
27. For a critical analysis of the failure of Arafat's leadership of the Palestinian Authority after Oslo, see Glen E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).
28. For an insightful discussion of these issues, see English, *Armed Struggle*, 307–15.
29. Ross, *The Missing Peace*, 764.
30. The quoted phrase is from Charles Enderlin, *Shattered Dreams: The Failure of the Peace Process in the Middle East, 1995–2002* (New York: The Other Press, 2003), 235.
31. For various comments supporting these views, see Glen E. Robinson, "Being Yasir Arafat: A Portrait of Palestine's President," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 2003): 138; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall—Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 517ff.; Baruch Kimerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 317ff.; and Agha and Malley, "The Last Negotiation."
32. For this polling data, see Horowitz, *Still Life with Bombers*, 99–100.
33. See Agha and Malley, "The Last Negotiation," 18. They also argue, or rather assert, that the deal itself will create trust where none existed, a dangerous assumption with no evidence to support it.
34. Cox, Guelke, and Stephen, "Introduction," in *A Farewell to Arms?*, 1.
35. Paul R. Pillar, "A Scapegoat Is Not a Solution," *New York Times*, June 4, 2004.
36. For a successful illustration in a similar context, see Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Allan Lane, 2002), 352ff.
37. I am not sure who devised this term, but I think I first saw it some years ago in several works on regime theory.
38. Sharon's views are discussed in James Bennet, "Shaper of Modern Israel: Sharon the Warrior," *International Herald Tribune*, August 16, 2004.

39. One does not mean to deny that some Israeli actions and some of its policies have been unacceptable violations of international norms, such as the targeted assassinations of terrorist leaders, but the failure of the Palestinian Authority to act must also share some of the blame. While Israel should be bound by the various Geneva Conventions, it does have the legal and moral right to maintain order and to act in self-defense. The dilemmas that all countries now face in dealing with sustained terrorist assaults or in averting them are apparent, in terms of civil rights and in the unfortunate likelihood that casualties may be inflicted on civilians in the course of preventive or retaliatory actions. But Israel has faced the severest terrorist threat, and it is ironic to see some of its critics (for example, the Labor Party in the United Kingdom) chastising it for certain actions and policies that they now advocate against real or potential terrorists in their own countries.

40. This paper was in press when Sharon suffered an incapacitating stroke, making revisions impossible. Since my argument is not about the short-term policies of any one leader but about the long-term effects of the conflict syndrome, the costs of not being able to revise the paper are bearable.

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Robert L. Rothstein is the Harvey Picker Distinguished Professor of International Relations (Emeritus) at Colgate University. He has written or edited nine books and some eighty articles and has been a past fellow of the United States Institute of Peace, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Carnegie Foundation. He has also received several research grants from the U.S. Department of State and the United Nations. His most recent book, jointly edited with Moshe Ma'oz and Khalil Shikaki, is *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: The Lessons of Failure*.

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