

**Gaza Disengagement and U.S. Reengagement  
in Arab – Israeli Peacemaking**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee: it's an honor to have the opportunity to testify today on the pursuit of Arab – Israeli peace and American efforts to address the current Israeli – Palestinian crisis.

Over the past twenty-five years, I have had the privilege to serve as an advisor on these matters to the last six secretaries of state, including until January of 2003, to Secretary Powell.

During this period, I developed a profound faith in three propositions. I believed in them when there was a peace process worthy of the name, and I believe in them now when everything reasonable Israelis, Arabs, and Americans sought to achieve lies broken and bloodied:

- 1) There is an equitable and durable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict – no perfect justice but one that can satisfy the needs of all sides;**

**2) This solution can only come about through negotiations based on a balance of interests not on a skewed balance of power;**

**3) There will be no serious negotiations, let alone solutions without the U.S. engaged as a full partner.**

These propositions shape my testimony today just as they have shaped the policies of the U.S. government for the past thirty years. We cannot afford to abandon them; to do so means abandoning any hope for a solution and surrendering the field to the crueler and more impersonal forces of history and to continued confrontation.

I would like to use my time with the committee to share my observations of Gaza disengagement, what might need to be modified to make it succeed, and what elements a second Bush or a Kerry administration will need to consider if they undertake – as I hope they will – a serious and sustainable U.S. approach to Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

**First, the focus on unilateral actions, specifically unilateral disengagement from Gaza, is an outgrowth of the profound crisis in the entire structure of Arab-Israeli peacemaking. For the first time in a decade, there is:**

1) no serious negotiation between empowered Israelis and Palestinians;

- 2) no mutually agreed framework within which to negotiate – no Madrid, no Oslo, no permanent status parameters, and no chance right now for the road-map;
- 3) no trust and confidence between leaders who are driven by zero sum game politics instead of common vision or for serious progress;
- 4) and no third party U.S. role to facilitate, bridge gaps, or defuse crisis.

Without over-dramatizing, what is now at stake is a threat to the very structure that delivered two successful peace agreements between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Jordan and a heroic attempt to produce a third between Israelis and Palestinians: **bilateral negotiations – sometimes direct, often under U.S. auspices to reach agreements. Indeed, unilateral solutions without reciprocity are a dangerous precedent which will not resolve conflict, leave a thousand problems unaddressed, and could paradoxically demonstrate weakness and court terror.**

**Second, as presently constituted -- and under prevailing political conditions among Israelis and Palestinians -- unilateral disengagement is probably unworkable. At the same time, it's the most important idea proposed by any party in four years of confrontation. With substantial modifications, the Israeli initiative might be used as a reentry point for re-launching a serious interim Israeli –Palestinian negotiation and over time, reengaging in permanent status issues. Modifications would have to include:**

- 1) A direct empowered Israeli – Palestinian dialogue. “Day after” Gaza withdrawal issues demands it;
- 2) A meaningful link in time and substance to the West Bank. Gaza first cannot become Gaza only;
- 3) Palestinian reciprocity. In the Middle East, giving requires getting. Even the current Egyptian effort to force consolidation of PA security services and a ceasefire reflects this;
- 4) The Arafat problem will need to be addressed;
- 5) Defining a political horizon. Even if it is fashioned as a set of commonly accepted principles, there needs to be hope of a broader political process. Here the U.S. role is critical.

**Third, political realities and circumstances will need to change among Israelis and Palestinians if there is to be a serious political process.**

- 1) On the Israeli side, either a National Unity Government or new elections will be necessary to ensure a political center capable of serious movement;
- 2) On the Palestinian side, either a reckoning or a reconciliation will be required between Fatah and its Islamic and secular opponents leading to a ceasefire and/or a monopoly by a centralized authority over forces of violence within Palestinian society.

**Fourth, because nothing ever happens quickly between Israelis and Palestinians, unilateral disengagement will remain virtual at least until early in 2005. Our**

presidential elections will further delay matters as all sides await the outcome. And the political realities -- Republican and Democratic alike -- will ensure that the Administration does not raise its profile on this issue; nor that it emerges as a topic of serious debate in the campaign.

In the interim, during the remainder of the year, the best possible approach would be to try to:

- 1) Encourage serious Israeli-Palestinian discussions on Gaza withdrawal, particularly day after scenarios;
- 2) Continue to support Egyptian efforts to consolidate security services, promote inter-factional dialogue, and identify elements for a ceasefire;
- 3) Focus Israelis on their responsibilities for removing settlement outposts and launch honest discussion on West Bank settlement policies while focusing Palestinians on their obligations for combating terror and promoting reform;
- 4) Intensify public diplomacy in the region highlighting U.S. commitment to continue efforts to advance a two-state solution and to resolution of all permanent status issues.

**Fifth, the next Administration will seriously need to consider how to engage on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.** With the possible exception of the outcome of our efforts in

Iraq, no issue is more critical to U.S. influence and credibility in the region. And there are few issues on which American national and moral issues coincide with something else: a demonstrated capacity to make a bad situation much better. Whatever approach the next administration adopts, three realities need to be faced up to squarely:

- 1) Oslo failed because unlike the Egyptian-Israeli and Jordanian-Israeli negotiations, it was not based on a balance of interests but on an imbalance of power. The skewed asymmetry in which Palestinians wield formidable power of the weak (abdication of security responsibilities and acquiescence of terror) and in which Israelis wield power of the strong (the capacity to create settlements and confiscate land) must be addressed and corrected;
- 2) The age of heroic politics and leaders in Arab-Israeli peacemaking is over for now. In the absence of leaders with vision able to bring along their constituencies, progress will be slow, incremental;
- 3) Even incremental progress will be unlikely without a much more proactive and assertive U.S. role.

**Sixth, with a leadership role consisting of the following elements, the next Administration could transform the situation on the ground within six months and create an environment for serious negotiations, even over time, on permanent status issues:**

- 1) **A real priority:** The President must make it unmistakably clear that the Arab-Israeli issue is a top priority and that the Administration is unified on the issue;
- 2) **High level attention:** Empowerment of the Secretary of State or a high level political envoy with the President's full confidence to assume 24/7 responsibility for this issue;
- 3) **Serious U.S. diplomacy:** The roadmap is an important instrument but it needs a third party as a driving force to create timelines, sequenced responsibilities, benchmarks, and performance standards with accompanying monitoring mechanisms;
- 4) **Behavior on the ground:** The parties must be focused initially on changing behavior on the ground: Palestinians on combating terror and violence, the Israelis on a freeze on settlements and related activities;
- 5) **Arab state support:** Only if we stand up will we get the support we need from key Arab states. That support needs to be directed at pressing Palestinians on security but supporting them as well politically and financially; blocking funds and support for Hamas/Jihad; and reaching out to Israel with confidence builders as the situation improves;

- 6) **Define a political horizon:** re-launching negotiations on permanent status is not possible right now. But the U.S. in association with others can create a non-threatening political horizon that outlines general principles required for a **negotiated** settlement. This should not be a detailed blueprint (the parties need to negotiate that). But it should lay out parameters for resolution of key issues.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not briefly allude to an issue of great importance to the United States and to this committee. Specifically, the challenge of dealing honestly with the image of America in the Arab and Muslim world and the need to generate more effort and resources to eliminate the misperception, confusion, and stereotype that now surround that image.

Seeds of Peace has been involved now for more than a decade in trying to promote understanding between Arabs and Israelis, Indians and Pakistanis, and Greek and Turkish Cypriots. This summer we will be running a new program called Beyond Borders which will bring young Arabs, including Saudis, Kuwaitis, Iraqis, Yemenis, Egyptians, and Jordanians, together with young Americans for two weeks of intensive dialogue. In the spring of 2005, the entire group will have a regional follow-up experience in Jordan. In the years ahead, I hope to be able to offer this experience to hundreds of young Arabs and Americans.



Mr. Chairman, these may well be generational conflicts, and we are in danger of losing an entire generation of young Arabs, Palestinians, and Israelis to forces of hopelessness and despair. We must do a better job of taking this generational challenge more seriously and invest the resources and legitimacy in efforts to promote better understanding among prospective leaders and publics.