

March 25, 2002

Breaking the Cycle of Middle East Violence

The renewed U.S. effort to bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians is doomed to failure—unless the Bush administration is ready to fundamentally change its approach. So far, Washington's efforts have amounted to little more than hand wringing, sloganeering, anxious finger pointing, and the occasional, useless demands to stop fighting.

We must accept the fact that the Israelis and Palestinians cannot live together. The notion of a shared community has been a non-starter ever since the 1917 Balfour Declaration. Nor will the answer be found in recent formulas—the Oslo Agreement, the Wye Accords, the Mitchell Plan, or even the Tenet Plan—because none of them offers either side the right incentives. Essentially, the Israelis do not have to move and the Palestinians have given up hope.

We need to tell both sides that we will help if, and only if, they agree to four fundamental, non-negotiable principles.

First, the Palestinians have to give up any “right of return” to territory in Israel proper. The past 54 years cannot be erased. Israel is a fact; it is here to stay. The Israeli people have the right to live in security within their own boundaries and the Palestinians have to realize that Israeli territory is lost to them.

Second, by the same token, Israeli settlers have to abandon the West Bank. The Palestinian people should have the same right to a secure, self-governing territory that the Israelis have. Israel has no legitimate right to the West Bank. Rather than declare that Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's newest land-for-peace idea “will not be a focus” of new U.S.-led talks in the Middle East, we should endorse it and build on it.

Third, a Palestinian state has to be constructed on the West Bank—sooner rather than later. It has to be a sovereign entity in every sense of the term. Israel cannot have a veto over any aspect of the construction of a Palestinian state. It may not confine Chairman Arafat to virtual house arrest nor declare that Palestinian sovereignty—the nature of which Israel now defines—can be exercised only over a certain percentage of the West Bank territory. Israel's only claim on a Palestinian state—at least initially—would be to ensure that it not be used to compromise Israeli security. As time passed and wounds healed, relations between the two states could be established, particularly an economic relationship.

Finally, Israel and Palestine both must renounce sovereignty over Jerusalem. Both sides desperately want the city and both refuse to recognize the other's right to control it. Control by one side or the other would perpetuate and probably even escalate the violence. The result of shared control would be the same because at this point in history Israelis and Palestinians cannot cooperate on anything other than killing. They must agree that Jerusalem will become an international city controlled and supervised by an international administration, perhaps under the control of the U.N. Jerusalem then would be open for the peaceful use of Jews and Muslims as well as Christians, who have as strong a claim as Jews and Muslims to the city.

The Bush administration must make it clear to both sides that if they accept these four principles, we will put the substantial resources of the U.S. to work in support. Until then, neither side gets financial, security, or diplomatic support from the U.S.—none!—and that entails suspension of the \$2 billion in annual security aid to Israel. Once the four principles have been agreed to, fleshed out, and implemented, the U.S. will provide aid to both countries to support economic development and security, including internationally supervised border protection and a grievance process to resolve inevitable residual conflicts.

Until these things happen, we will continue, quite literally, to whistle past the graveyard.

—Steven E. Meyer
Professor, National Defense University
(The views expressed are those of the author alone.)

The Center for Public Justice, P.O. Box 48368, Washington, DC 20002-0368
(410) 571-6300 * Fax: (410) 571-6365 * <http://www.cpjustice.org>

Feedback to the author on this Capital Commentary: CapComm@cpjustice.org

Subscribe/Unsubscribe by emailing: CapComm@cpjustice.org

General Inquiries Email: inquiries@cpjustice.org.

May be photocopied or retransmitted in its entirety but not otherwise reprinted or transmitted without permission.