

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

## A Guide to the Perplexed

### Issue 2: The Failure of the Road Map and Empowering Palestinian Moderates<sup>1</sup>

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TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL & PALESTINIANS AT THE RED SEA SUMMIT IN AKABA, June 4, 2003  
R-L, KING ABDULLAH II OF JORDAN, P.M. ARIEL SHARON, US PRES. GEORGE W. BUSH & PALEST. PM ABU MAZEN

**Myth: There Is No Palestinian Negotiating Partner:** Israeli disengagement from Gaza and parts of the West Bank can't lead to a renewal of peace negotiations, since Israel has no one to negotiate with on the Palestinian side. Palestinian moderates have no power, and there's nothing Israel can do to strengthen them and help them stand up to Arafat and the terrorists.

**FACT: IDF Chief of Staff Lt. General Moshe Ya'alon has stated that while Arafat bore most of the responsibility for moderate Mahmoud Abbas' fall from power as the first Palestinian prime minister last year, scuttling the Road Map, the "miserliness" of Sharon's political concessions to Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen) contributed to his demise.** "There was a window of opportunity," said Ya'alon, speaking of last summer when there was a Palestinian unilateral cease-fire, and President Bush had unveiled the Road Map peace plan. "The Americans were at the height of their strength due to the victory in Iraq. **The Palestinian street supported Abu Mazen's cabinet and opposed terror.**" **Israel could have helped Abbas stand up to Arafat, said General Ya'alon, and must avoid repeating the same mistakes with Ahmed Qureia, the current Palestinian prime minister.**

Ephraim Sneh, a member of Knesset (Labor) and former cabinet minister, a retired IDF major-general and former head of the Israeli administration in the West Bank, believes that "What Sharon really wants is to solidify his grip on the West Bank and materialize his vision of the final boundaries of Israel, giving the Palestinians sovereignty in seven West Bank enclaves and Gaza, with Israel retaining half the West Bank under its control... Sharon's plan is based on the false assumption that there is no Palestinian partner. He made sure there is none by giving nothing to a possible moderate partner, because such a partner would not accept his final vision of seven enclaves plus Gaza as a Palestinian state." (*bitterlemons.org*, 7/19/04)

**Myth: There's nothing the US and Israel can do to help empower responsible Palestinian moderates.**

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<sup>1</sup>This text is adapted from Mark Rosenblum and Gidon D. Remba, *From Baghdad to Jerusalem: A New Road to Middle East Peace?* (forthcoming)

**FACT: There are steps that the US, Israel and moderate Arab states can take to bolster Palestinian moderates:**

- US-allied Arab states like Egypt and Jordan, along with the European Union and the UN Secretary General, should ratchet up the pressure on Arafat to yield more authority over Palestinian security bodies to the democratic reformers and doves who are in the throes of rebellion against Arafat's near-monopoly on power, following the continuing anti-Arafat unrest in the occupied territories.
- Palestinian moderates and democratic reformers need to demonstrate that they can be a partner by further challenging Arafat to relinquish control over security bodies.
- Israel can coordinate a withdrawal from areas of the West Bank and Gaza with Palestinian leaders who are willing and able to take security responsibility for areas Israel evacuates, as both the IDF Chief of Staff, Major General Moshe Ya'alon, and the Bush Administration, have urged.
- The Bush administration should insist on a time-line and a mechanism for monitoring and enforcing Sharon's fulfillment of his written promises to Bush to immediately remove settlement outposts, enact a comprehensive settlement freeze and remove those checkpoints which have no real defense value for Israel.
- The U.S., Egypt and Jordan should train and equip a new Palestinian force, as has been proposed, while American monitors oversee a renewed Palestinian effort at security cooperation with Israel.
- Instead of releasing Palestinian detainees to Islamic extremists like Hezbollah, Israel should free a sizable contingent of high-value Palestinian political prisoners to the moderates.
- The U.S. should work to convert Sharon's unilateral plan to encompass a redeployment of Israeli forces away from Palestinian cities back to their September 2000 positions.
- This strategy would pave the way for Palestinian elections, enabling the moderates to gain fresh legitimacy and new powers—especially increasing control over a consolidated Palestinian security body—through the ballot box. In exchange for an effective truce and a sustained Palestinian anti-terror campaign, Israel would withdraw progressively from all of Gaza and parts of the West Bank, removing both settlers and armed forces, genuine de-occupation steps it neither proposed nor took before.



P.M. ARIEL SHARON (R), U.S. PRES. GEORGE W. BUSH AND PALESTINIAN P.M. ABU MAZEN (L.), AKABA, JUNE 4, 2003

## **The Road Map, the unilateral Palestinian cease-fire and the prime ministership of moderate Mahmoud Abbas were scuttled by a three-way unholy alliance:**

**Arafat** had no intention of sharing power or the spotlight with erstwhile Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and the reformers. He played the obstructionist, unwilling to abandon the tactic of “armed struggle” in exchange for a process based on incrementalism. While the political gains achievable under the Road Map’s first two stages are substantial when compared to the Palestinian present, they fall far short of Palestinian expectations for a viable state in virtually all of the West Bank and Gaza, a complete end to Israel’s occupation, a shared Jerusalem and a mutually acceptable resolution to the refugee issue. Arafat likely feared that Sharon would freeze the process before it reached the final status talks, leaving the Palestinians with a cantonized mini-state in less than half the West Bank. He chose the dismal status quo over any improvement in the Palestinian situation.

**Abbas** was unable, and Arafat unwilling, to take steps mandated by the Road Map requiring the Palestinian Authority to begin “sustained, targeted, and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure” including “commencing confiscation of illegal weapons and consolidation of security authority, free of association with terror and corruption.” Abbas’ efforts at domestic reform and peacemaking with Israel were blocked by Arafat with a generous assist from leaders in Jerusalem and Washington.

**Sharon** knew that Abbas had limited popular support on the Palestinian street. He realized that if Abbas were to survive politically, he would need extensive help from Israel, tangible results that could be shown to Palestinians as a payoff from the peace process. But a moderate Palestinian partner came with too steep a price for Sharon—a down payment on those “painful compromises” to which he paid lip service. These confidence-building steps included a comprehensive freeze on settlements, the removal of the 51 unauthorized settlement outposts built since Sharon’s election, a redeployment of the IDF from major Palestinian cities, the release of a sizable number of Palestinian security detainees, reopening Palestinian offices in Jerusalem, and the improvement of conditions of daily life for ordinary Palestinians.

Sharon likely feared that a successful interim agreement would yield the following scenario. The Palestinians would control nearly half the West Bank and afforded the opportunity to rearm during a truce. When final status talks broke down, as Sharon believed was inevitable under his stewardship, and the Palestinians returned to “armed struggle,” Israel would be in an inferior strategic position having relinquished large swaths of territory to a better-armed force than before. He chose to avoid any negotiating process by setting the bar unattainably high for Palestinian reform as a precondition for renewing negotiations, while continuing a strategy of IDF counter-attacks and targeted killings. In addition, he intensified building a unilaterally drawn separation barrier. An IDF military operation against Hamas during the Palestinian unilateral cease-fire (*hudna*) in July 2003 prompted a devastating terror attack in Jerusalem in August, leading to the unraveling of the truce, the Road Map, and the Abbas government.

Even a cease-fire could not survive the militarization of the conflict and the flight from negotiations. After weeks of haggling over how many and what kinds of prisoners would be released to Abu Mazen, a highly symbolic issue for the Palestinian street, a relatively small number of prisoners, many of whom were criminals, were released to the great disappointment and discredit of the Abu Mazen reformist government. Some four and a half months later, large numbers of Palestinian prisoners were subsequently released to Hezbollah, raising the question why these prisoners were not released to the most promising Palestinian democratic dovish leader in the PA but rather to a radical Islamist organization widely regarded by Americans and Israelis as a terrorist group. **Had Sharon proposed to disengage from all of Gaza and part of the West Bank during Abbas’ tenure, it would have greatly strengthened his position and that of other Palestinian moderates.**

**Bush** was unwilling to commit the political resources needed to keep the process moving.

- Bush Administration efforts at renewing Palestinian-Israeli negotiations were episodic, without sufficient professional diplomatic support on the ground. When John Wolf took over as the diplomatic point man, he lacked the status and political resources to provide the monitoring the Bush Administration insisted would be in his hands. A high-profile envoy with presidential authority was not named to work the issue.
- Sufficient monitoring of Israeli and Palestinian compliance with commitments did not take place.
- Sufficient efforts to retrain and restructure Palestinian security forces were not forthcoming.
- Little was done to strongly prevail upon Sharon to meet his obligations. These included the Road Map's unconditional requirement that Israel immediately dismantle settlement outposts built since Sharon's election and redeploy the IDF from areas reoccupied during the intifada. Bush failed to pressure Sharon to take steps which would have provided the Abbas government with tangible assets to improve its prospects for competing with, if not defeating, Arafat in the battle to rein in terrorism and democratize Palestinian politics. Despite the Road Map's call for a mutual and comprehensive cease-fire, Bush failed to dissuade Sharon from resuming counter-terror strikes. Nor did he take the necessary steps to overcome Sharon's resistance to the simultaneous implementation of Israeli and Palestinian obligations called for in the Road Map.
- The President breached the Road Map's innovative simultaneous implementation formula, by agreeing with the Sharon government's insistence that a sweeping array of reforms by the PA would have to be implemented as a condition for any Israeli confidence-building measures. In short, the Administration engaged in double-talk over the core issue of *simultaneity versus sequentiality of obligations* (see below).
- Nor did the President prevent Sharon's mishandling of the release of Palestinian prisoners, a key confidence-building step the importance of which Bush could have stressed during Abu Mazen's tenure.
- **Bush's contribution to the demise of the Abbas government—and the Road Map—was death by negligence. The President promised publicly to ride herd on both parties to monitor compliance with their Road Map obligations and hold them accountable for violations. But, as one pundit put it, Bush never even saddled up.**



**Objection: Moral Equivalence of Settlements and Terror?** Doesn't the Road Map's approach of requiring *simultaneous mutual action* by Israel to remove settlements and outposts and freeze settlement construction while Palestinians take steps to halt terror and violence assume a false moral equivalence between Israeli and Palestinian actions?

**RESPONSE:** The approach of the Road Map which calls for simultaneous action by both sides, without preconditions based on the other's conduct, does not assume moral equivalence at all. It is concerned only with what it will realistically take to make a truce and negotiation process succeed where previous efforts have failed. It focuses *only* on what is necessary for enhancing Israel's security—not on which side is more righteous or blameworthy. The overriding goal of moderate Palestinians in any peace process is to bring about an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, including Israeli settlements and the military occupation which supports and protects them, realizing an independent Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel. The overriding goal of moderate Israelis in any peace process is to live in freedom and security in a democratic Jewish state among its Arab neighbors. **The only question a security-minded Israeli (or Palestinian) should ask is: what must be done now for a peace effort to succeed? Moral grading is simply beside the point here.** To offer a simple analogy: sometimes you have the right of way as a pedestrian, but if you insist on your right of way (your moral or legal rightness) when a car is coming in your path, you may end up dead. Better to set aside the question of who has the right of way, and focus on what it will take to keep both you and the driver alive and well. Much the same goes for Israelis and Palestinians. **Here's how the Council of Foreign Relations put it, in a statement crafted by leading Republican and Democratic diplomats—including Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Advisor to President George H.W. Bush and Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Carter:**

“All previous efforts to end violence on both sides and turn to a political process (the Mitchell recommendations, the Tenet cease-fire work plan and the Zinni mission) have failed to gain traction on the ground, primarily because each side maintained that the first step must be taken by the other. If the Road Map is not to encounter the same fate, **the U.S. administration and its Quartet partners must insist on a 100% PA effort to end violence that is *unconditional and independent of actions demanded of Israel.* The U.S. and its Quartet partners must similarly insist on an equally unconditional cessation of Israeli settlement expansion (including so-called natural growth) that is independent of actions required of Palestinians.**

“This parallelism is not to suggest moral equivalence. It is to recognize that no peace talks are possible if Palestinians fail to exert 100% effort to halt Palestinian terrorism or if Israel continues through its settlement policy to encroach on Palestinian lives and property. **No matter how incommensurate, both must cease unconditionally and without reward as a necessary precondition for the political process envisioned in the Road Map.** The Road Map should present specific standards of compliance for the Palestinians with regard to their efforts to stop terror and for the Israelis with respect to settlement activity. It should offer a detailed security plan which spells out what each side must do in order to be deemed in compliance. The plan should provide for an independent mechanism to monitor implementation.”<sup>2</sup>

**To learn more, please see other issues of Myths and Facts about the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict:**

*Issue 1: Settlements and Disengagement from the West Bank and Gaza*

*Issue 2: The Failure of the Road Map and Empowering Palestinian Moderates (current issue)*

*Issue 3: Palestinian Attitudes Towards Peace with Israel and the Question of Yasser Arafat*

*Issue 4: Why the Oslo Peace Process Failed: A Way Out of Israel's Current Impasse*

*Issue 5: Objections to Peace Now: The Fence and Disengagement*

*Issue 6: How Israel's Settlements Dilemma Arose: A Capsule Summary*

<sup>2</sup>See Council on Foreign Relations, “Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” February 2003, at [http://www.cfr.org/publication\\_print.php?id=5533.xml&content=](http://www.cfr.org/publication_print.php?id=5533.xml&content=)

To learn more about Peace Now's approach to security through peace for Israel, please visit <http://www.chicagopeacenow.org/> and <http://www.peacenow.org/>

Chicago Peace Now, the Chicago-area affiliate of Americans for Peace Now (APN), is a Zionist organization that affirms the right of Israel to exist in peace and security as a democratic Jewish state. We believe that the only durable settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a two-state solution between Israel and a territorially and economically viable non-militarized Palestinian state. Shalom Achshav—Peace Now—was founded in 1978 by 348 reserve officers of the Israel Defense Forces who believed that only a negotiated end to the conflict in the Middle East could bring true security to Israel and her people.

Comments welcome at [contactus@chicagopeacenow.org](mailto:contactus@chicagopeacenow.org)

### **About the Authors:**

**Mark Rosenblum** is the Founder and Policy Director of Americans for Peace Now (APN), the leading American Jewish organization promoting Middle East peace, and the sister organization of Israel's Shalom Achshav movement. Mr. Rosenblum is also a historian at Queens College of the City University where he is the Director of the Michael Harrington Center and head of its Middle East Project.

Mr. Rosenblum has spoken and written extensively as a Middle East political analyst. His radio and television appearances include The Larry King Live Show, CBS and NBC evening news, CNN, and National Public Radio; he is currently a Middle East analyst for MSNBC. His most recent writings have been featured in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *Miami Herald*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Washington Jewish Week*. He has been frequently cited as a Middle East expert and quoted by leading newspapers including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and *Ha'aretz*. He is completing two forthcoming books, *Two Jerusalems, One Peace: Capitalizing on Reality* and with Gidon D. Remba co-editing *From Baghdad to Jerusalem: A New Road to Middle East Peace?* In 1999, the *Forward* newspaper selected Mr. Rosenblum as one of the fifty most influential American Jews.

**Gidon D. Remba** is a political analyst, commentator and writer on the ethics and politics of the Arab-Israel conflict, and President of Chicago Peace Now, the local affiliate of Americans for Peace Now, which supports Israel's largest peace group, Shalom Achshav. His essays have appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *Nation*, the *Jerusalem Report*, *Tikkun: A Bi-Monthly Critique of Jewish Politics, Culture and Society*, *Chicago Jewish News*, *JUF News* and other periodicals. With Mark Rosenblum, Founder and Policy Director of Americans for Peace Now, he is currently co-editing an anthology titled *From Baghdad to Jerusalem: A New Road to Middle East Peace?* Mr. Remba has appeared as a featured guest on various radio interview programs devoted to the Middle East, including National Public Radio's Worldview.

Mr. Remba served as Senior Foreign Press Translator in the Israel Prime Minister's Office from 1977-1978 during the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David peace process. He translated the Knesset speeches of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, and Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, as well as Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin and other Israeli leaders for the foreign press during the period from Egyptian President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem until the Camp David Peace Accords. He co-translated Sadat's Knesset speech into English for the world press.

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