THE AL-AQSA INTIFADA
CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS

REVISED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
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CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARAB STUDIES
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Foreword: Modernity’s Victims

Mamoun Fandy

Despite this season of sorrow and the immediate need to stop the bloodletting in Palestine, it is important to think broadly about the global implications of the current crisis. My only observation for you this morning is that the Palestinian situation exposes the deficiencies of the modern international order and the limits of modernity at large. The implications of such an observation reach far beyond Palestine to include almost all the communities that do not neatly fit within modernity’s requisites.

By modernity, as we all know, I mean the expansion of the domain of the written word while trampling upon the realm of orality and oral tradition. Modern politics and modern intellectual trends are about eliminating or suppressing everything that defies precise definition and does not lend itself to easy categorization. The sovereignty of the nation-state lies in its power to define and to make these definitions stick. Everything that self-defines or eludes modernity’s categorical grasp is a challenge.

The Palestinian situation and the Palestinian person are modernity’s challenge. Since the current international system is a function of modernity, the Palestinians become the victims of three layers of oppressive structure: modernity, the modern international system, and the Israeli occupation.

Thus, the Palestinian situation is unveiled as a triple tragedy and its full complexity must be addressed. One dimension of the problem is in Israel’s hands. The other dimensions of the tragedy lie within the larger contradictions of modernity and the current international system, which caters to sovereign states at the expense of various unfortunate but distinct communities. If we are to adopt such a perspective, the limitations of the current rhetoric of leaving the two parties to arrive to a bilateral solution on their own stand out, and the intentions behind it become obvious.

If one takes the issues of refugees, or what Oslo calls “displaced persons,” as an example, and contrasts it with Israeli settlers, the contradictions become more glaring. Most Palestinians who live in refugee camps and want to return to their homes in Palestine might not have the written papers to prove their ownership of the home. A home that might have been in the family for hundreds of years might not satisfy the requirements of the modern nation-state and its criteria for property rights. Palestinians could bring many witnesses to testify that, indeed, a particular family has resided in this particular home for years or a particular refugee family has a key to their old home that they were driven out of, but modern nation-states listen only to papers and legal documents.

The Israeli government was aware of this. Following the June 1967 war, the Israeli military government controlling the
West Bank almost immediately ended an ongoing land registration campaign. At the time of the suspension of the program, approximately 60 percent of the West Bank was left without a standard form of titled ownership (Foundation for Middle East Peace, "Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories," January 1993).

This is not the whole story. Even Palestinian homes that are under the control of the Palestinians are often dead assets. As Hernando De Soto has shown, this is a larger problem that runs throughout what we used to call the Third World. Since the homes are not incorporated into legality, it would be extremely difficult for a Palestinian to sell his home if he wanted to or get a loan against his home to better his lot. Hence, the exclusion of the Palestinians from the world of legality has excluded them from the market and the world of transactions. Thus, it becomes obvious that the Palestinian home is only recognized within the testimonials of the oral tradition. Beyond that, this home does not exist.

Israeli settlers, on the other hand, have become written people of modernity, both inside and outside of Israel. They have access to all the paraphernalia of modernity that give them legal, economic and political rights.

The dilemma of the Palestinians is that they aspire to be part of a legal system that does not recognize their existence. The Palestinians call for a settlement based on Security Council Resolution 242, which was the result of interstate wars. This resolution relegated the Palestinians to the status of a refugee problem; even our current conversation about the Madrid conference and the subsequent Oslo agreement has been reduced to a conversation over "land for peace," with little mention of the people. As we adopt this state-centered language, we become unaware that we are trampling upon various fragile communities who were pushed into unfair arrangements. Albanians, Kurds, and Chechens are but a few examples.

Across the globe, there are many bounded communities within states that are waiting to shatter their iron cages.

By no means is Israel the only modern state in the region that uses violence as a means of domination. Although it might be heresy to say so, the rest of the states in the region—whether Turkey or Arab states—resort to violence as a way of dominating their unwritten societies. However, none of these states use helicopter gunships against stone throwing youngsters.

If one looks at the results of the recent Arab summit, one cannot help but notice the disjunction between the words of moderation coming from Arab states and their leaders, as opposed to the anger and frustration of the popular masses and the unwritten communities from Casablanca to Oman. Because of their incorporation into the regime of modernity and because they are aware of the consequences of their action globally, Arab states were timid in their response. In a very ironic twist, many modern Arab states are sensitive to Israel's security concerns. By stark contrast, the Arab states were forthcoming in their response in 1973, when they used oil as a weapon. The strength of the response at that time was due to the fact that the struggle in 1973 pitted Israel against Arab states, not against an unincorporated community. The difference between the global concerns now and then also makes the point.

For a Palestinian story to be heard, Palestinians have to be written first. Only when a Palestinian refugee is written can he or she have access to modernity, to become a legal personality, and consequently to acquire eco-
conomic and political rights. Thus, the issue is not only the independence of the Palestinian state that would give Palestinians a legal personality, but rather the improvement of the economic conditions of the Palestinians. The paradox is that the state, which is supposed to administer justice, is the same state that is confiscating Palestinian land.

Another paradox relates to the state of Israel as an outpost of modernity. Because of its exclusive type of nationalism, Israel does not accept the incorporation of the Palestinians in a binational modern state with similar legal and economic rights. Thus, modernity is limited by the nature of the Israeli state and the state of Israel is limited by modernity's parameters.

The only recourse for a Palestinian family is to appeal to international law, but international law deals only with sovereign states and the Palestinians have not yet acquired this sovereignty.

The question is not a Palestinian question as much as a global question: How many homes have fallen in the crack between modernity as embodied by the written word and oral tradition? It is the story of the native inhabitants of many places from the Americas to Africa. Our duty is to expand our understanding of the international system to accommodate not only states, but also unwritten communities.

Finally, the politics of reconciliation are about forgetting past atrocities and injuries, but the birth of a modern state is about registering and writing a history and a national narrative through schools and various institutions. The Palestinians are required to build institutions of remembering the birth of a state and simultaneously are asked to adopt the politics of forgetting for purposes of reconciliation. Here are the limits of modernity.

The Palestinians are victims of both modernity and occupation. Thus, it is incumbent upon all of us to reflect not on those who are included in the world of modernity, but also on modernity's victims.


Preface

The Al-Aqsa Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza has transformed the Arab-Israeli conflict in ways that may not be fully understood for some time. The intensity and horror of the daily violence, combined with the frustration of a peace process gone sour and access to uncensored images and information brought about by the digital revolution, are making this intifada qualitatively different from the 1987-93 uprising. There is particular cause for concern, as the focus of debate among both Arabs and Israelis has shifted from how to achieve a just, equitable and secure peace to whether peace is possible at all. We look at the future with some trepidation as we see the region spiraling downward into a maelstrom of ethnic and religious polarization, and possibly toward a wider conflict. All of us at Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) hope that this dark future can be avoided.

Since its inception in 1975, the Center has sought to provide balanced, objective analysis of the Arab world. In particular, it has followed closely the course of the Oslo accords since their signing in 1993. During that time, CCAS has hosted numerous academics and policymakers, many of whom voiced optimism that a brighter future lay ahead for Palestinians and Israelis. In recent years, however, less sanguine analyses warned repeatedly that continued occupation, settlement expansion, economic decline and an overall loss of hope throughout the West Bank and Gaza were creating a powder keg that could explode in certain circumstances. The intifada that erupted on September 28, 2000 may prove to be a watershed event in the Arab-Israeli conflict, with lasting effects on the political dynamics of the Middle East and on the regional interests of the United States.

With this in mind, the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies convened a special conference on October 25 to bring together well-known experts from the academic, government and media communities to focus an analytical spotlight on the roots and possible future scenarios of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The results of the conference were judged substantial enough to warrant wider dissemination. To that end, CCAS has decided to publish this edited transcript of the conference proceedings as a CCAS Report.

The Center for Contemporary Arab Studies would like to express its appreciation to political scientist Dr. Mamoun Fandy for his leadership in organizing the conference, as well as to Public Affairs Coordinator Anne Marie Chaaraoui, Assistant Director Sandra S. Tamari, Development Coordinator Lesley Newton, Publications Coordinator Stephen Brannon and graduate student Paul Dyer for their hard work in preparing the conference and this ensuing CCAS Report.

Barbara Freyer Stowasser
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The Future of the Peace Process

Graham Fuller

believe we can safely say that more external forces—especially European states and the U.N.—will now be playing a bigger role in the peace process, simply because the U.S. monopoly over the process has not brought desired results.

The Arab world is perhaps showing displeasure more openly than ever before. Is this a serious shift or just a transient stage? Is it simply another period of rock throwing—of rage that then retreats, and we go back to the same old game? I do not think that any of us know. But there are some reasons to think that perhaps this time the Arab world, and indeed the Muslim world, will be less willing to simply retreat and turn this issue over to the U.S. Many of the reasons are well known to you.

The fact that Jerusalem is now at stake gives it not only a local flavor or even an Arab flavor, but also a Muslim world flavor. We are seeing pressures and concerns on that issue. We have a more candid Saudi Arabia than we have ever seen before. It is fascinating to see Crown Prince Abdullah speak out on these issues, and I suspect he will grow more candid rather than less. His perspective is more pan-Arab, and I use this term guardedly, than we have seen from Saudi Arabia for a very long time—perhaps since King Faisal. And I think Jordan too, although highly moderate in its approach to these issues, has the reality of its own Palestinian population and is going to have to be bolder. Egypt, as the ambassador reminded us, is very uncomfortable and unhappy. So I think we are going to see a somewhat more forceful voice from all these states as well, which may encourage others to come into this game. I do not think any of the Arab states are happy or comfortable with the American monopoly on the peace process.

Now, Russia is really far afield on this issue. Russia always prefers to limit U.S. unilateralism or a U.S. monopoly in foreign policy, but Russia's voice simply is not going to be very strong. To summarize, the European Union, or specific E.U. states, might end up in the next decade functionally providing the global balance to U.S. power and weight in a way we have not seen since the days of the Soviet Union. In other words, if the Arab world is looking for an alternative source of weight to balance, moderate and modify U.S. positions, that is probably going to be Europe, and maybe Japan, much more than any Russian source.

But we need to remember that every time we have a crisis, we wonder if this is going to be a new turning point, a watershed in Middle Eastern politics. I think it is too early to say if this is a real watershed, but I am inclined to think it might be a couple of reasons. One of the most important is the dismay and possible collapse of the Israeli left. This is a very serious event if it has actually taken place. I know that it has taken place temporarily. I would argue that the Israeli left has been a very critical
force in bringing along a change in mood not only inside Israel, but also within the U.S. itself and the Jewish community here. There has been a strong, respectable left—or left-of-center, or liberal, however you want to call it—that has spoken up and been able to support a greater balance in the peace process than we might have had otherwise. One might also thank Bibi Netanyahu for this, because I think Netanyahu did more than almost any other force to bring about an opening and a greater balance in this country. Washington simply found his policies and style so difficult, and even offensive on occasion, that it brought about a de facto balance where even Arafat was a more welcomed figure in the White House than Bibi was.

But if the Israeli left is mortally wounded, then I am very concerned, because this means that within Israel, we will not see what I would consider creative and constructive forces. They are on the retreat and on the run. This will inevitably be reflected in American politics as well, where liberal American Jews and members of Peace Now simply no longer are going to feel they can speak out in the kind of voice that they had before. That will change the Washington mood very significantly, starting with Congress but even with the executive branch. So, if anything major has happened, it may have been the destruction of the Israeli left.

The other side of this coin is the strength of Arab rejectionists, not in the classical, old Syrian or Iraqi rejectionist sense, but the sense that some kind of guerilla struggle might pay off; that Hizballah was successful in Lebanon in expelling the Israelis simply through attrition, and that another intifada can be equally effective in rolling the Israelis back. Unquestionably, further violence will affect the Israeli calculation and in the end, a new “balance of pain” will emerge. The greater pain of Palestinian deaths, which will be at a far greater rate than Israeli deaths, and the high diplomatic costs to Israel, will ultimately bring about a new balance of rationalism. I think, however, that it will come perhaps years down the line and after a great deal more violence.

But what will be the message that the Palestinians, and particularly the Islamists, draw from this? Will the answer be that if we proceed with this kind of tactic and approach we can roll Israel certainly back to its 1967 borders? Or perhaps, if it looks like Israel is weakening or losing its grip and becoming less rational in its behavior, it could encourage people to believe that actually there are almost no limits. So the question I am posing to the Palestinians is, in a search for victory of one kind or another, what do they believe to be the limits of that victory? Is the victory going to be as much as you can get, or is there a clear sense of what would constitute a victory whereby people could say, “Okay, we have more or less arrived at the point of victory now for what we have to have, and we are ready to go”? I think there are going to be many elements in the equation who are not sure where that border of victory is, and many will seek to push it indefinitely. This will be equally explosive for the future.

Now, the Persian Gulf (or the Arabian Gulf) has always been tied to the peace process, although no one likes to admit this. Certainly, ten years ago Saddam Hussein sought to exploit the Arab-Israeli problem. He created the Gulf crisis and worked it with a clear eye toward the Arab-Israeli problem as well. The Gulf has been involved in broader Middle East politics not just through Saddam Hussein, but also through a whole variety of other ways. There is linkage. If the
U.S. is losing its monopoly over the peace process, what about the U.S. position in the Gulf itself?

I would argue that our Gulf policy is in tatters at this point. We have somewhat successfully kept Saddam Hussein in the box for ten years. Let me be very blunt about this: I think Saddam Hussein is the most bestial character I have seen in the modern history of the Middle East. Please pardon my hyperbole, but I defy anyone to come up with an alternative candidate to Saddam Hussein in this regard. That the U.S. has exercised double standards in criticizing Saddam Hussein is not in doubt, but this does not take away from the fact that this man has been one of the biggest disasters for the entire Arab world. The Arabs deserve much, much better than that.

So, I am sad to say that I think this current crisis is going to strengthen Saddam Hussein. For Arabs, and especially Palestinians who have been brought up in weakness and humiliation, the fact is that anybody, including Saddam Hussein, who will stand up and shout at the West, will gain instant regional support at the popular level, particularly among Palestinians. It is an entirely predictable and understandable process, but a dangerous and unfortunate one. I would hope for much better for Iraq and the Arab world than Saddam represents. In any case, U.S. policy by now toward Saddam is a failure and too many Iraqi children are dying. Never mind that Saddam has imposed this on the children. If it were not for the sanctions, these children would not be dying at this point, whatever Saddam's role.

Our policy toward Iran has been very weak. We are trying to change it, and we have turned a corner on this. I do not know when we will have an improvement. The fact is, though, that we have been pushed by Europe and others, including the Gulf states, to change our policies more quickly towards Tehran.

Where are the Gulf states going to come down on this present crisis? On the one hand, I could argue that a more active Iran and Iraq may impel America to become more active, to move more vigorously into the Gulf out of concern for what either Saddam or Iran will do. I think there is a good chance Saddam will try to do something reckless again, because he has done it repeatedly and he does not show any signs that he has a learning curve. However, a greater U.S. involvement in the Gulf would put us in a difficult position. I think the reality is that the Gulf states do not want a major U.S. presence. The price is rising every day, as we have seen in the USS Cole incident.

I am not sure whether the Gulf is going to figure in this problem, but if anti-American terrorism should grow, and it may—was the Cole bombing a one-time thing or the beginning of a series of terrorist acts?—I fear that the rhetoric of anti-terrorism in Washington will become stronger, which will affect the peace process too. Certainly, the Israelis always prefer to treat the Arab-Israeli problem in terms of “terror” versus “process,” conveniently forgetting that terror can come from the barrel of a gunship as well as from a lone bomber. To stress the anti-terrorist agenda is already to take an unbalanced approach toward the nature of the problem. I condemn terrorism, and I particularly condemn it against innocents—women, children, on buses, planes, etc. However, there are many different kinds of terrorism, and if we are moving toward a new era of terrorism, it is going to increase the imbalance of the U.S. posture toward the region. Indeed, many regional states do
not mind terror because they would rather deal domestically with terror than they would with legitimate political opposition within their own societies.

I fear that another old question is going to come back up again in Washington now. This relates to democracy or democratization in the Middle East. Washington has never been enthusiastic about this for many different reasons. I think the case may be better made now than ever before that more democratization, when it comes to the Middle East—were it to come, and I am not holding my breath—would complicate regional issues even more, because it will lead to more open expression of popular dissatisfaction. The case may also be made that the “Arab street”—I hate this term because it suggests a mob—and Arab public opinion is more radical and more unhappy than the regimes in power are willing to express. What will the regimes do as a result? Will they move to embrace Arab public opinion in an effort to preserve and protect themselves? Or will regimes deem it necessary to crush some of this because of a perceived threat to their stability. I do not know. It will vary from one state to the other. Washington, if it was ever inclined to flirt with possible democratization, will have greater reason to fear democratization than ever before. Arab regimes will have a greater excuse in telling Washington that they do not want to move toward democratization at this point because, “After all Mr. President, all these people who are so angry with the peace process will then have a dominant voice.”

Let me conclude now by suggesting that we are moving into uncharted waters. I mentioned at the outset of my talk that geopolitics has perhaps come back into the Arab-Israeli process. In other words, other external forces are going to be active now that were not in play when the process was handled by a tiny handful of people. Indeed, I myself and many of you had ceased to follow the peace process as a strategic regional problem, because to follow the peace process meant reading hundreds of little items every day about every inch of negotiations and the next meeting with the prime minister and this paper or that paper. It had become an incredibly technical exercise. That technical exercise is over, ladies and gentlemen. There is nothing technical about what is going on now. We are back to geopolitics.

I believe we are moving into uncharted waters. It could be a creative spasm that will let loose—as war often has done in this part of the region—new forces bringing a new kind of equilibrium. I hope it does not have to come to war, but I do feel that violence of some kind is almost a necessity, not because we want it but because the situation will inevitably produce it before a new balance between the pain on the Israeli side and the pain on the Palestinian side emerges—when neither side can stand it anymore.

The U.S. security commitment to Israel is absolutely clear, but the Israelis know better than anybody that all the weapons in the world that Washington can deliver to Israel will not help them solve almost any single aspect of this new phase in the struggle for a more just Middle East.
A Report From Palestine

Khalil Jahshan

Let me start by saying that I have good news and bad news this morning. I will start with the bad news. Last night, I attended the signing ceremony at the White House of the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Jordan. I learned there that President Clinton has invited Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to separate meetings in Washington in a renewed attempt to revive the agreement reached a few days earlier at Sharm Al-Sheikh.

It is indeed worrisome news in the sense that, while I am not opposed in principle to such meetings, I firmly believe that they constitute a significant risk to the credibility of all three parties due to lack of adequate preparation. This is the main reason that led to the failure of Sharm Al-Sheikh and Camp David. The problem has been further aggravated by the continuous propensity of the president to depend on his own personal charisma and power of persuasion instead of adequate analysis and preparation to see what needs to be done, how it can be accomplished, and how to tackle the most serious problems.

The good news, on the other hand, is the announcement by the Israeli military establishment that the current intifada in Palestine could drag on for months or more than a year. I am personally opposed to violence and concerned about the instability it causes throughout the region. I am particularly concerned, however, about the high price in human and material terms that the Palestinians have paid thus far. But it seems to me that, having wasted the past few years on a non-productive negotiating process, it will now be difficult—short of a prolonged intifada—to get out of this predicament that we have been witnessing for the past nine years.

Let me give you a brief assessment of what is going on in Palestine. In the context of the larger political picture in the region, no development has been as far reaching in its political significance as has the current situation unfolding before our eyes in Palestine. Even less than a month old, the Al-Aqsa Intifada is proving itself to be one of the most significant events in recent Palestinian history, with far reaching political implications to the national interests and concerns of all the parties to the conflict, both inside and outside the region. It started few weeks ago as a simple demonstration, a clash of limited military significance, in reaction to a specific provocation at Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Yet it has quickly grown into a major political development that is unprecedented in the past 33 years of occupation.

If you look carefully not just at the magnitude but also at the political significance of what is happening, this little intifada has taken on a life of its own as a broad uprising by an occupied population. It has mushroomed into an international crisis with serious national security implications for the whole region and beyond. Its significance is illustrated by the two summits that...
have been quickly arranged to contain the political fallout from the events that are occurring in Palestine and inside Israel. Many of you have heard me speak on this campus before. I am not prone to emotional exaggeration or romantic attachment to political events. However, I sincerely believe that this is one of the most important developments in the modern history of the Palestinian people. Its results will, for better or worse, be with us for a long time to come.

You might ask how this limited uprising assumed a larger-than-life stature. First, its most visible impact is on the peace process itself. The Al-Aqsa Intifada has finally put the Oslo process out of its misery. This is recognized by key supporters of the process today. For instance, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa declared in a recent interview: "The peace process, as we have known it during recent years, is finished. Nobody among the Arabs, and especially among the Palestinians, will agree to return to the negotiating table on the basis of the old criteria and standards. Right now, the resolute stance taken by the Palestinian people, and its resistance to Israel's conquest, is the top priority." His statement speaks for itself.

Second, Palestinian public opinion has been frustrated by the fact that the peace talks have reached a dead end, or to be more precise, a cul-de-sac in the sense that they have been running in an empty circle without a definitive end in sight. This has contributed significantly to the rising frustrations that led to the current outbreak of violence. In terms of prospects for the future, frankly, I am not optimistic. We recently have witnessed a very serious degeneration of this conflict to levels that are not conducive to a political solution. I am a believer in a political solution, but I do not think the environment right now in either Israel or Palestine is receptive to a political solution. Barak's "three nos"—no to a redvision of Jerusalem, no to a return to 1967 boundaries, no to dismantling the settlements—have been replaced by an even more threatening policy based on three concepts.

The first is a time-out from the peace process. Barak has not defined what time-out means but it is not Clovis's version of time-out. Barak's time-out is, basically, a "no" to peace with the Palestinians.

The second concept is the national emergency or unity government proposed by Barak. Is he using it as a threat or is it a serious possibility? To bring Ariel Sharon into the coalition government means nothing less than ending the political option. Can you imagine the international reaction had Arafat expanded the P.N.A. to include Hamas and Islamic Jihad and assigning their leaders cabinet positions? He surely would be condemned. Why is there not a similar reaction to Barak's stand?

Third is the concept of separation, which is a euphemism for apartheid. Separation is about building walls of mistrust instead of tearing them down. With all due respect to Barak, he does not seem to heed his own advice. I had the opportunity to meet with him a few years ago when he retired from the Israeli military and came to Washington as a fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. During our conversation, Barak stated, "If we Israelis want to have a genuine and durable peace with our Arab and Palestinian neighbors, we must learn how to stop being condescending to them."

Unfortunately, Barak's policies towards the Palestinians since his election in 1999 have been nothing but pure condescension. Camp David is a case in point where Barak's offer to the Palestinians was nothing short of a dictate.
Implications for the Arab World: The Intellectuals and the Street

Ibrahim Karawan

I want to sum up my initial statements by saying that in recent political debates in the Arab world, which I have been following in 15 newspapers and eight television networks, the issues raised are indeed interesting to follow. However, these debates have been mostly ignored in the U.S. media, apparently in favor of an oversimplified notion that Arabs are largely incapable of coming to different conclusions, or even articulating the issues. I do not know what explains this characterization, but I have been surprised at the attention given in the U.S. media to certain views that do not correspond to the main ideas circulating in the Arab world, including the ideas in our discussion here.

I am not suggesting the Arab world and its regimes have become tolerant and democratic overnight. Rather, I am arguing that in a crisis atmosphere, nobody knows the answers or how to deal with such a situation. Some positions previously taken for granted have been subjected to serious rethinking. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, there is a window of opportunity for some different opinions to be expressed. They are expressed because intellectuals and activists are looking at the intifada as a “political position confirming case.” Much like social scientists refer to certain situations to confirm their academic arguments, political activists can also look at specific political episodes as real life cases to confirm their long-held positions. I have identified four themes in Arab debates worthy of shedding some analytic light on.

First, there is the question posed by the intellectuals concerning where we are in the trajectory of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Are we at a stage where more conflict and escalation can be expected, or are we moving in a direction where progress toward settlement in the historical sense is more likely? Some have said that the Arab-Israeli conflict is essentially over, for better or worse. Of course, they are in a bad position today because they cannot claim the current crisis as a political example confirming their own assessment.

Others have suggested that we are moving in the direction of a settlement, and that the region is undergoing nothing more than a historical zigzag in the process of reaching such a political settlement. One does not necessarily have to be a proponent of a settlement to reach such a conclusion. The prominent Egyptian leftist writer Mohamed Sid Ahmed, for instance, was not enthusiastic about an American-engineered settlement after which the guns would fall silent, but he thought in 1974 that détente between the two superpowers then would duplicate on a regional level what was happening then on a global level. Once détente
paved the way for the demise of the USSR and the emergence of American primacy, then other writers had more reasons for expecting that the region would follow with a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Another theme in Arab debates—present even before the latest intifada—is that the issues addressed thus far by the Arab-Israeli peace process are not the most difficult areas of contention. Once Israel accepted a total withdrawal from Sinai in return for Egypt’s exit from the Arab-Israeli war equation, an agreement between the two countries became within reach. The Jordanian-Israeli front proved equally receptive to settlement.

But consider the complex issues facing an Israeli-Palestinian final settlement: Jerusalem, refugees, water, sovereignty, security, and borders. These are the issues with no easy solutions and they were exactly the issues that former American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wanted to stay away from in the mid-1970s because he felt they could bring failure. His logic was that American diplomacy could bring about the necessary momentum to proceed incrementally towards a settlement. Egypt’s President Sadat subscribed to this notion and presented it to Egyptians in numerous speeches in which he used the English word “momentum.” This momentum has never adequately materialized regarding the thorniest issues of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All breakthroughs were achieved outside the issues of Jerusalem and refugees. We still have to deal with these dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The new intifada can make the Palestinian Authority less likely to adopt the type of “electric shock therapy” that Sadat embarked upon. Americans officials used to say to Arafat something like this: “If only you could become more like Sadat, daring to take a stand, not worrying about other people, and not worrying about even your own people if they have reservations about it. If you do that, then you will enter history strongly and you will reach a settlement as well.” One impact of the intifada is that this kind of “electric shock therapy” is less likely at the current juncture, because it has been demonstrated that Arab publics might not easily digest it. Leaders are interested in political survival, and one of the lessons of this intifada is that Arab public opinion should not be viewed as analytically and politically irrelevant.

Second, there is the question about the strategic choices or “where do we go from here?” It is not prudent to conclude from the reaction to the intifada by intellectuals and the Arab street that a strategy of protracted military and political confrontation with Israel is the only way to go. A serious setback for the peace process does not justify that war with Israel becomes the unavoidable Arab course of action forever—not only until the West Bank and Gaza are liberated, but also all the land from the river to the sea. The logic presented in some television programs in which I have participated or watched involves a sort of mobilization of the street. However, this must be done via strategic calculation, not through sheer passion. There will be a return to negotiations at some point, perhaps under a somewhat different political formula.

What has intrigued me is the notion that the intifada has proven that the Arab street wants only sustained military confrontation with Israel. In these debates, there are those who posit that the main lesson to be drawn by the Palestinians must come from the recent experience from Lebanon in confronting Israel militarily. Lebanon has its
own set of conditions, but we are told that this is the best way for the Palestinian struggle to proceed. Proponents of this viewpoint stipulate that the Arab regimes must refrain from exploring peace with Israel as a strategic option, because it is nothing but surrender. Moreover, an end has to be put to negotiations with Israel, and Arab regimes must use their assets to influence the world in favor of the Palestinian cause. They must mobilize their populations and teach them to hate Israelis. If regimes fail to follow these measures, we have been told, then the masses will bring them down.

I do not know how many times over numerous years I have heard, with insistence, that the regimes in the Arab world were on the verge of being toppled. The implication of this insistence that the masses are waiting around the corner to bring the regimes down requires either a vivid imagination, or lack of appreciation for history, or both. The notion that “the regime must accommodate the street or the street will bring down the regime” is an interesting slogan. How many regimes have been brought down by a rebellious street in the Arab world lately? How many Arab regimes were crushed by an angry street because of a sense of betrayal regarding the Palestinian cause? Did that happen, for instance, to the Egyptian, Jordanian, or Syrian regimes after their open confrontations with the Palestinians?

In response to this call for protracted struggle, the regimes have asked, “Do you want war?” The response almost always has been, “That is not what we are recommending.” This is exactly the point. This position does not have wide support in the Arab street, the same street that is described as “undifferentiated” in its commitment to an endless struggle against Israel. The street indeed does have great sympathy with the Palestinians, but when it comes to reckoning costs, then it is not terribly eager to pay a huge price.

It turns out that Arab regimes are not exactly hobbled leviathans, as has been suggested by many analysts and observers of Arab politics. Most of these regimes have proven themselves to be capable of some political learning to avoid undesirable outcomes. At the recent Arab summit, they outbid the Islamists in their denunciation of Israel, and proved willing to sign communiqués calling for trying Israeli officials as war criminals. Obviously, the U.S. has veto power over this. They gave some money to support the Palestinians. They also called on those Arab states with diplomatic and some economic relations with Israel to suspend those relations and make their resumption contingent on some progress on the Palestinian front, or, to a lesser extent, the Syrian front.

I am merely suggesting that Arab regimes have resorted to a multiplicity of actual and symbolic steps, while clearly reminding their societies that there is no affordable military solution to the conflict with Israel. Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, former editor of Al-Ahram, pointed out that there is neither a purely military option (hal ‘askari), because of the severe asymmetry of power, nor a purely diplomatic solution (hal diplomasi), which could not succeed for the exact same reason. It is not simply a case of sending able diplomats to a meeting or skilled generals to the battlefield: it is the relative power capability that a state or group of states can put behind them. In between these two courses of action, Heikal stressed, is a political solution (hal siyasi), a complex and prudent utilization of a blend of power capabilities to reach attainable objectives.

Arab regimes are reminding their people of this, and one can see that in the
media of these countries. After 1967, the regimes are saying, Israel could not impose its political will on the Arabs even though they were victorious militarily. In 1973 the Arabs did much better. Still, even after mobilizing vast human and material resources for over six years, they also were unable to dictate their political will. Israel could not dictate its will in Lebanon either. A purely military or diplomatic solution is not in the cards. The regimes have reminded their populations of the costs of protracted war and conflict. When the conflict is discussed without reference to the costs, all sorts of rash ideas can be presented, but when reminded of the costs, a more sober analysis emerges and a tangible program, not a wish list of desirable objectives, is largely supported.

Third, there is the question that pertains to the issue of al-umma wa‘al-dawla (“the nation and the state”). Many Arab intellectuals have adopted the notion of al-zaman al-‘arabi al-radi’ (“the bad Arab times”) to describe contemporary Arab conditions. Things were not going well; the regimes not only were repressive but they had become more daring in ignoring Arabist and Islamist red lines in public, not only in secret. Their violation of the taboos of the 1950s and 1960s became the reality of the 1980s and 1990s. Then suddenly came the intifada of 2000 and many, as if recovering from a collective depression, jumped to the conclusion that Arab problems may be withering away! “Now we can get the initiative back into the hands of al-umma al-‘arabiyya (“the Arab nation”) and restore its freedom of action decisively. The intifada will have to be perpetuated in light of this.”

This cannot be true. The Arabs could not have had “the bad Arab times,” with their structural and normative components, and then suddenly conclude that, due to the intifada, all balances and imbalances of power—what was referred to in the Arab world as the tawazun al-da‘f (“balance of weakness”)—would be radically altered. All of these problems (i.e., authoritarianism, underdevelopment, and dependency) have not been overcome or replaced by elements of strength.

The insistence that the masses are waiting around the corner to bring the regimes down requires either a vivid imagination, or a lack of appreciation for history, or both.

The sympathy with the Palestinians in the Arab world during the intifada is strong. It is spontaneous, not deliberately orchestrated by the regimes. The question now is about how, not whether, to take the reaction of the street into account. The regimes would not be forced to collapse, but the holes in their legitimacy, which already exist for other reasons, might increase if they failed to take it into consideration. Nevertheless, these feelings do not determine the policy agenda of Arab states. The decisions taken in the last Arab summit stressed the will of the sov-
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eign states; the policies adopted were really recommendations to be reviewed by each Arab government. If a recommendation helps the Palestinian cause, some might adopt it, but others may not necessarily follow the same course. Before saying not only that political Arabism is striking back, but that it is triumphant, let us remember that there is much room for policy ambiguity and conditional types of policy responses among Arab states, according to each state’s calculations of its interests.

Fourth is the crucial question that concerns the role of the United States. President Sadat, a quarter century ago, came up with the slogan that America holds 99.9 percent of the cards in the game of a Middle East settlement. There are other Arab leaders who hold similar perspectives. These include Mr. Arafat, who reached the conclusion that the U.S. remains indeed a very important player, although it may hold only 85 percent of the cards. However, one of the implications of the intifada is the growth of doubt in the Arab world about America’s policy in the Middle East. There is more skepticism in countries having close relations with the United States. How does one account for Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah’s remarks that American policy toward Israel has made it possible for Israeli rulers to maintain their heavy-handed policies? This is a statement that must have been considered repeatedly before being delivered due to its political significance, specifically in light of the political succession issue in Saudi Arabia itself.

I think there is a growing sense that American policy has betrayed those who predicted that it would bring benefits. There is a sense that a close association with U.S. policy may not be terribly prudent at this time. I am not suggesting that Qatar will actually expel the U.S. Air Force, or that Bahrain will not continue to have the headquarters of the American fifth fleet there. I am saying that Arab states will share an interest, at least at the level of declaratory policy, in distancing themselves somewhat from the United States. It is not politically prudent to be too close to American policy currently. We should expect that in this complex situation, where close association with U.S. policy is undesirable, Arab states are likely to reflect a more selective posture toward the United States.

This shift is due not only to the pressures generated by the intifada of 2000; in fact, it started in response to American positions regarding Iraq and Iran. There is here a cumulative process that the intifada, being close to home and having significant political symbolism, has contributed to. Arab regimes are calculating enough to address the United States, regardless who the next president will be, and say: “We have public opinion too. We cannot be pushed around to give concessions while the other side is not doing the same, but is counting on your support. We want to use that phrase Americans use: ‘We have to reflect the diversity of opinions in our own society about this external matter that has its own domestic political significance.’”

In closing, if we study these debates, we can find them informative. They are in many ways challenging the rulers by providing an alternative program. Often they also have elements that defy those with the loudest sloganeering voices. I came out of reviewing and thinking about these vigorous political debates in the Arab world encouraged and inclined to think that things are better than what the New York Times may say.
The Arab Summit: The Arab Response

Clovis Maksoud

The summit that took place in Sharm al-Sheikh prior to the Arab League meeting was intended to limit the objectives of the Arab League meeting. In this it was successful, for it downgraded the Arab League’s response to the outrage that characterized the uprising in Palestine and throughout the Arab world. The demonstrations in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Oman and the U.A.E., where people take to the streets rarely, should be taken as an indicator of things to come if the grievances of the Arabs and the Palestinians are not seriously addressed.

Before I assess the Arab League summit, it is necessary to inquire as to why, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the absence of a countervailing force, and the place of the United States as the sole superpower, supposedly entrusted with the peace process by both parties, do the Oslo agreements remain flawed and why have they failed? The reason is simple: it is that there has been an addiction to the process, not necessarily to a just peace. Let me explain.

Since 1967, Israel has not considered the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem as occupied territories. The absence of this legal assumption, regardless of what the negotiating equation was, predetermined the ongoing hemorrhaging of the credibility and
effect of the peace process. The ambivalence which led to co-opting the Palestinian delegation into negotiating this “peace process,” without clarity as to the legal basis, allowed Israel to be exempted from being answerable to the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention by the U.S. “mediator” or “facilitator”! Thus, Israel is an occupying power without admitting it. Of course, the Palestinian delegation, throughout the Oslo process, was calling Israel an occupier and negotiating on the basis that occupation is a transitional phase toward independence. Negotiations became the method by which the Palestinians hoped to achieve self-determination that leads to an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. However, this became a wish list rather than a realizable outcome.

Negotiations begin invariably with a broad agreement on an outcome. However, that outcome has never been defined in this case. It has never been admitted by Israel. Therefore, the intermittent violence has continued because Israel considered itself the controlling power, a claimant power. In this aspect, the differences between the Likud party and the Labor party are slight. Likud claimed the entirety of the occupied lands, and the Labor party, or Barak’s One Israel, claimed undefined and unspecified parts of the occupied land as part of Israel. Throughout the entire negotiating period—and even at Camp David—the process seemed to be designed to subordinate the outcome required to the domestic considerations of both Barak and the United States.
The basic flaw in the Oslo agreement is the fact that there were no real negotiations, only discussions and talks. While the Palestinians felt that they were negotiating, they were in fact only spelling out and conveying their wish list. They were, in a sense, commentators—critical commentators—on the controlling power of Israel. Given this, the accumulating frustrations and disillusionment unraveled the faulty process. Sharon’s visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif was only the tip of the iceberg of provocation and humiliation.

This is a synoptic description: Israel does not recognize itself as an occupying power. This as stated earlier makes it totally unanswerable to the Fourth Geneva Convention, and renders the Palestinian people, today, legally, the only occupied people in the world. There are many others who feel that they are occupied. However, from the view of international law, the Palestinians are the only people under occupation, and by an occupying state that does not acknowledge that it is an occupier!

I believe the United States, at this late stage, must investigate as to why its investment of time and the prestige of the American president over the last seven years did not bring any commensurate results. It should be asked why the team advising the president on these issues misread the situation. Were there some defects in their advice or in their analysis of the developments in the region? This team, which has been there on an ongoing basis for over seven years, has brought the situation to the disarray we are witnessing now. Still, President Clinton—perhaps with all good intentions—called on Mr. Arafat and Mr. Barak to come to Washington again in the hopes of reviving their agreements. This is a situation in which people do not know whether to get angry or just to laugh! And so, if there is any seriousness on the part of the United States government, there must be an inquiry into the team that has advised the president for the last seven years. Was it presenting policy options twisted by previous prejudices and training at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, or was it providing a scientific, objective analysis of the realities that exist in the Occupied Territories? This inquiry must be made in order to provide the United States with what it has always avoided: namely, a reassessment of its policies in the Middle East.

I am not going to go into the drama of what has been happening. Just yesterday, while the White House was receiving King Abdullah to sign a trade agreement, there were nearly 100 demonstrators wounded in Jordan. How does the media here interpret these events? Scapegoating Arafat. The media finds it necessary to focus on a person in order to simplify the complexity of the issues in the conflict and to gloss over the disproportionate loss of Palestinian civilian lives. I have been personally critical of Mr. Arafat in the past. I have criticized his administration, his way of negotiating, and his negotiators’ silly “fraternization” with Israeli negotiators. Despite this, I think that the media, the United States government, and President Clinton have tried since Camp David to unjustly shift the blame on Mr. Arafat. Personalizing the conflict is an easy way out and an alternative to inquiring into the real reasons for the manner in which the peace process has unraveled over the past three or four weeks.

The Arab League summit met and announced its resolutions. Some of these resolutions are good steps, indicating that there is some sensitivity to the so-called “Arab street,” which is contemptuously dismissed
in the U.S. as irrelevant, volatile, radical and fundamentalist. Nobody ever wants to treat it as an authentic expression of genuine anger. The summit acknowledged that there is anger. However, their methodology focused on how to diffuse this anger rather than how to harness it for empowering the Palestinians to achieve their basic national rights.

The summit was caught between two dilemmas, or, more frankly, two fears. First, many governments fear their people. They worry that this anger might unleash an uncontrollable force that has been suppressed for a long time. Secondly, the Arab states have a fear of—or is it deference to?—the United States. The League’s call for an international force in the Occupied Territories is a logical demand. An international or U.N. force would provide the possible balance needed for serious negotiations and no longer continue the series of dictates by Israel. It would make the negotiations consequential and productive. Yet, the Arab League should have known that going to the U.N. would mean facing American and Israeli vetoes. Israel repeatedly says that under no circumstances will it accept any U.N. involvement. The Arab League summit demanded that a U.N. force be put in place, and this was a correct demand. But to be credible, this demand has to be followed by further measures such as suspending diplomatic relations with Israel by Jordan and Egypt. These measures were not put into place, and this is the weakness in the Arab League’s resolve. As long as the Arab League’s collective decision is not considered credible, and unless the Arab countries with diplomatic ties to Israel do not recall their ambassadors or, better yet, cut their diplomatic relations—unless Arab countries make an effort to make Israel’s behavior in the Occupied Territories costly—then the Israeli veto [over U.S. policy], and the U.S. veto in the Security Council, will persist.

When the United States says that it is the only credible broker, it is because Israel says that America is the only party that can intervene in the peace process. While I have no objection to the U.S. being a broker for the process, it should under no circumstances play the role of a unilateral mediator between the two parties, because it cannot be objective, fair, or evenhanded. This is because Israel, for the U.S., is not just a foreign policy concern but also a domestic political priority, as everybody knows.

When the Egyptian and Jordanian governments state that their international obligations are equally important to their national Arab responsibilities, specifically addressing the issue of not breaking ties with Israel, this prompts the Arabs to lower their summit expectations. Are we to remain in this dilemma, this dichotomy, with the Arab people on one side and the Arab governments on another? This question renders the region unstable and the prospects for peace unrealizable. If we consider, as everyone in the Arab world does, that peace is a strategic objective, then it must be made costly for Israel to continue on the path that it has undertaken before and during the intifada.

We have now three alternative solutions or outcomes. First, there is the creation of a democratic, secular state of Palestine. This is a very noble ideal, but it is not achievable in the foreseeable future. Second, there is the option of a two-state solution, including a Palestine within the boundaries of 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital. The third is the consecration of the present apartheid system, but it would be a paradox if at the end of the twentieth century we were to witness the end of apartheid in South Africa only to see it revived with vengeance again.
The Al-Aqsa Intifada: Causes & Implications for U.S. Interests

Shibley Telhami

There is no question that the Palestinian-Israeli issue has once again broadened way beyond the boundaries of Palestine and Israel. There is no question that there has been a limited linkage in the past decade between the Palestine-Israel conflict and the rest of American policy in the Middle East. There has been a success, from the American point of view, in managing the relations between what happened in the different arenas—in managing what transpired in the Palestine-Israel conflict, managing Iraq policy, managing the relationship with friendly Arab states and managing the military presence policy. The linkage between these areas has been revived again.

There is no question that what is transpiring on the Palestine-Israel front is consequential in very important ways to Ameri-
can national interests. There is no question that any American president is going to have to deal with this. Those people who feel that you go on to relations as usual or a sort of cooling-off period have not come to grips with the magnitude of what has transpired. There has been a fundamental transformation in the nature of the conflict, which will be very consequential for everything else the U.S. does, whether that is relations with the Arab states or policies the U.S. wants to develop. The new American president, whoever is elected, will have to put this issue among the top issues on the new agenda. This is the result of the past few weeks.

But let me be more reflective about why the U.S. is having such a tough time now managing the crisis. After all, this has been a decade of unprecedented American preponderance of power in the region. In this period following the Gulf War, the U.S. has had a remarkable military presence in the region and the closest strategic relationship with Arab states it has ever had. It has also managed, to a greater extent than ever before, its simultaneous relationships with Israel and with the Arab states.

So, what is going on here that needs to be rethought? Why is it that in a time of crisis, the United States has people running away from it? After all, these strategic relationships are intended for times of crisis.

Middle East experts have said that Arab public opinion can do this and can do that, but after all, in the Gulf War, Arab public opinion did not do this and that. In the end, the winning argument was that ultimately you have to worry about governments. You know how to get governments to do what you want. Basically, you have a set of incentives and threats you employ to get governments to do what you want, and then you give them the incentives to get their publics to do what they want. An interesting example of this argument was during the first Camp David negotiations, when Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin were negotiating and Begin was asking Sadat to make all sorts of concessions. Sadat said, “If I do this, my public opinion would reject me, would not accept it.” Begin turned to him and said, “What public opinion? Public opinion is controlled by you. You control the media. You control every agency. You tell the people what you want them to believe. You told
them yesterday the Soviet Union was their best friend, and they believed you. Now you tell them that the U.S. is their best friend and they believe you. So don't tell me it is public opinion. That was the presupposition, and I think it also became the presupposition in this town to a great extent. I am exaggerating of course, but by and large policy has been shaped on the basis that you should not pay attention to Arab public opinion, that it is really a question of persuading leaders—usually not even governments, but individual leaders—to do what you want them to do.

Frankly, I think the complete puzzle about what has happened in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations was predicated on the assumption that there are no public red lines in the Arab world, that there is no red line that is defined by the Arab public or the Palestinian public or the Muslim public—that there is really nothing that is not possible, and that everything is up to a one-man leader who can say "yes" or "no" on Jerusalem, who can say "yes" on the Haram or "no" on the Haram, and it is really up to him. He can bring his public opinion to accept what he wants.

So there is this idea that public opinion is marginally important and, to the extent that it is, leaders can change it, and when they do not, they choose not to. Clearly, that is one of the frustrations with Arafat. Basically, they come out of it asking "Why?" The assumption is that Arafat, when he says he cannot do it, is resorting to tactics. He must be trying to get something out of it. There is no such thing as a red line. This idea explains much of what happened at Camp David.

I think the problem with that strategy is not only that you alienate public opinion so that in times of crisis it is not going to be on your side, but also that you alienate governments because you are constantly pressing them to choose. Nobody likes that, especially in a time of crisis. There has been no strategy that addresses this element, that objectively takes into account public sentiments in the region. This is something that clearly is going to have to be addressed. No new administration can go back to business as usual in this regard.

Let me move from this to what I think are the possible consequences of different scenarios that are unfolding at the moment on the Palestinian-Israeli front. By the way, I am among those who think that states are robust, for good or for bad, in the Middle East. They have proven themselves relatively resilient to public pressure. It is not that public pressure does not matter: it does affect the way states behave.

Frankly, I think that even though there was a postponement of cutting off relations with Israel at the Arab summit conference, if there is an escalation—for example, a Palestinian declaration of independence followed by an Israeli reaction—I do not think the Arab states would have a choice, for they have put themselves on a course where they have to address their publics. Obviously, the new media makes the situation more difficult for governments. During the Gulf War, governments did more or less cooperate to tell a different story to the public. There were very few pockets of dissent in the picture, and these pockets of dissent were actually the sore points in the relationship between the states where that dissent took place and the U.S. Jordan was the particular problem in the mass media issue, not so much because Jordan supported Iraq—because that did not matter, so to speak—but because Jordan was giving Iraq's story in its mass media. That clearly punctuated an otherwise consistently different story in the Arab
world. There was a management of the media by Arab governments.

Clearly, that management is much more difficult now. I do not want to say that such management is impossible, because remember that many of these media outlets are still semi-official, if not official, including Al-Jazeera. It is just that there are so many different media outlets available that it is very hard not to project the truth. I have been watching these media every morning and it is quite amazing what you hear, including pictures of the Palestinian victims and the humanizing of the whole struggle, as well as the new commentary. On Al-Jazeera, for example, you will find commentary that says that all Arab governments do not represent their people or that governments have squandered all their money on weapons that they cannot use against any enemies except their own people. This is the commentary you hear in the media. It is normal and regular on the most watched media in the region.

There is no question that there is a dynamic here that is consequential for every Arab state. It is clearly playing well in terms of mobilizing the public. I think that there is no question that the issue of Jerusalem is self-resonating. It is an issue that goes to the heart of matters. It is something that people can relate to. As I have argued before, Jerusalem is bigger than the issue of Palestine. Indeed the issue of Jerusalem is more important to people than the issue of Palestine in many parts of the Arab world.

What I see in terms of the current conflict is that, if there is no rapid political movement toward final settlement, it is hard to imagine a scenario where the level of violence would remain low. We are at a juncture where the Arab-Israeli conflict could go into a completely different direction. In some ways, it is being transformed. There are a couple of ways of looking at the conflict. One way is to see it as a conflict that can be resolved by the establishment of a single, democratic state, which was never really an option for Israelis, and is certainly even less of an option now. Or it is a conflict that, at the core, was a nationalist conflict that could be resolved by having two states, one Palestinian and one Jewish, next door to each other. This later framing lends itself to more compromises, despite the fact that you could have some injustice in this kind of settlement. Frankly, all the negotiations in the past quarter century have been based on the framing that this is a nationalist conflict, and that you need to recognize the national aspirations of the Palestinians and the Jews. As a consequence, the solution will be meeting the minimal aspirations of each.

What I see happening is that this whole idea may be disintegrating. I see it disintegrating because I see a return to an ethnic/religious conflict because of what happened in Jerusalem, and as a consequence of the mobilization of the Arabs that are citizens of Israel. Clearly, they were mobilized for a number of reasons. It has to do with their status. It has to do with their caring about Jerusalem. But I want to draw your attention to something that is really important in understanding the level of passion among the Arabs inside Israel. Ultimately, the two most difficult issues that derailed an agreement were Jerusalem and the issue of refugees. Those two issues were important to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. In a way, on those two issues, the Jews that are Israeli citizens and the Arabs that are Israeli citizens have completely different interests. They are diametrically opposed interests. By focusing on Jerusalem, the struggle was turned into an ethnic or religious identity struggle. The struggle has been reframed in
a way that certainly can transform how people view this conflict. I think that element makes the conflict harder to manage and more difficult to prevent. Civil war becomes harder to deter.

I cannot believe that unilateral separation is a viable possibility, although this idea is now favored by many in the security establishment in Israel, and probably by some among the Palestinians. The problem with separation is that there is no separation. There are settlements everywhere, and you would have to have a huge dismantling of them to have real separation. Assume that that does take place—and some people are contemplating it—then what do you have? It is hard to imagine that the Israelis are going to accept full sovereignty for the Palestinians without an agreement. That equates to autonomy. What does that mean? It means that Palestinians will not be allowed to cross the border into the international community without going through Israel. How is that going to happen in a situation of confrontation and hostility? Separation means strangulation really, which cannot work. So what you have is not low levels of violence but rapid escalation, as well as rapid mobilization of public opinion elsewhere in the Arab and Muslim world. You have consequences again for the U.S. everywhere. I do not see that as a solution: I see it as a possible outcome, and I think it may be headed in that direction, but it is not an outcome that can be seen as a basis for a negotiated settlement.

Let me say one more thing about the tendency in these situations to overstate the issues of security needs. In these times, there is a tendency to state over and over American determination to support the security of Israel, which is a very important component of American foreign policy. But let's look at the crisis now, which has nothing to do with the question of conventional security as we know it. Israel is capable of deterring Arab states readily. Although Hizballah was able to force the Israeli army out of South Lebanon and the Palestinians are able to put political pressure on Israel through their uprising, nobody among Arab states is learning that Israel is weak. Syria still knows that it is very unwise to engage Israel in war. Israel is far too powerful, it has deterrence capability, and Israel would defeat Syria. I think one could say the same thing about Egypt, as well as Jordan. All states are deterred. This issue is not about conventional deterrence. Rather, it is about defending against disintegration because no one can deter civil wars. You can deter war, but no one can deter uprisings or guerilla war.

The primary question now is not one of security. The challenge is to provide constructive and creative political ideas that could lead to a lasting peace. I do not see that this can happen through normal protracted bilateral negotiations. I see it happening more through bilateral relations between the United States and the parties, with the U.S. perhaps ultimately putting forth ideas on the table. In the current environment, it is hard to imagine that happening, and part of the reason for this is the absence of confidence between the United States and the Palestinian side. I think that there has been a problem in the past couple of months, and it has become more of a problem recently. There has to be a mechanism to rebuild a bilateral relationship that would enable the U.S. to play a more effective role in helping the parties come to terms. Frankly, I do not think they are going to do it on their own. There has to be an international proposal at some point, although no solution can be imposed on either party.♦
The Role of the Arab and U.S. Media

Hisham Melhem

Before I discuss the coverage of the Arab and the American media's coverage of the intifada, I would like to briefly give you my assessment of the current crisis. I am one of those people who believe that there are many reasons why the current spasm of violence in Palestine and Israel is qualitatively different. Let me start with one reason that is relevant to my own profession—being truly the oldest profession in the world—and that is the digital revolution or the information revolution.

For the first time, millions of Arabs are watching Israel's oppression of the Palestinians on television. They watch war and violence brought into their living rooms. It has brought home the magnitude of what has been unfolding there. This phenomenon explains, in part, the passionate reaction of Arabs throughout the Arab world. Satellite television, for a number of years, has been breaking barriers that had been erected by Arab states among their peoples, thereby changing the nature of the political discourse in the region. It is still very early to get a full understanding of the real impact of satellite television on how Arabs relate to issues taking place in different Arab countries brought to them by Arab media, through Arab commentary—through Arab eyes, so to speak. That is one reason, by the way, that there is this sense of growing outrage in the Arab world about the plight of the Iraqi people.

Very few people in their right minds in the Arab world would sympathize with the brutal dictator who sits in Baghdad, but there are a lot of people in the Arab world watching on satellite television the tragedy taking place in Iraq. So we have the digital revolution as one reason why the current crisis is qualitatively different from those crises which have preceded it.

Another reason, as far as the Palestinians and many other Arabs are concerned, is a failed peace process, nine years after Madrid and seven years after Oslo, with God knows how many agreements signed so far: Oslo, Cairo, Taba, Sharm, Wye—I was remarking this morning that, even as journalists, it is very difficult for us to follow all these agreements. So, nine years after Madrid, most young Palestinian men and women, when they look at the future—and here we are talking about the majority of Palestinian society, as the majority of Palestinians are under the age of 25—what do they see? They see nothing but an endless, bleak landscape. Therefore, nobody can talk about the promise of peace and nobody can talk about the peace dividend seven years after Oslo. That is why many people in Palestine are not willing to listen to those calling on them to save "the Oslo process."

The third reason, as I see it, is the gradual rise of religious movements or political movements with religious overtones. Here I am talking about both Israel and the Arab world, particularly the countries adjacent to historic Palestine. The rise of these movements has brought to the forefront a
different political culture, a different terminology, a different attitude, a different outlook, a different paradigm. That is one of the reasons why some in the region now, consciously or unconsciously, see the conflict being stripped down to its bare essence: a return to primordial loyalties, a communal settling of scores, a kind of absolute us versus them, Jews versus Arabs, Muslims versus Jews.

Add to that mix the new and historic assertiveness on the part of the Palestinians in Israel—I do not call them Israeli Arabs, they are Palestinians—and you have the makings possibly of a new, truly historic paradigm. I will be the first to admit that I really do not know where this will lead. Since journalists write the first draft of history, they should always resist being swept away by the immediacy of events. However, if we put the current intifada in perspective, it will be seen as truly historic.

Let us examine now the coverage of the Arab media. Obviously, Arab media supported the Palestinian intifada with no qualifications. This support was seen here, by U.S. officials and friends of Israel, as nothing short of incitement. State Department officials bitterly complained about the coverage of Arab satellite television such as Al-Jazeera and particularly Al-Manar, Hizballah’s satellite station, because they showed unedited raw footage of the violence against the Palestinians, and gave ample air time to commentators urging the Palestinians to continue the struggle.

This is really ironic. Those of you here in Washington who are familiar with how the Arab media works and how the State Department uses them should be struck by the irony of American officials complaining about Al-Jazeera, because they frequently use that satellite station when it is useful. When they want to send Arab public opinion a message or when they want to address Arab officialdom, they often use Al-Jazeera because the Arab elites watch that network.

Now, if you take a look at Arab editorials and commentary—from Yemen and the U.A.E. to Morocco and Tunisia—many of them pronounced Oslo dead and buried. There are scathing criticisms, not only of the Sharm Al-Sheikh summit, but particularly the Arab League summit in Cairo. Newspapers such as Al-Khalaj and others criticized Arab leaders, saying that their summit was hollow and proof again that they are not serious in support of the Palestinians. For example, one headline read “Between the Return of the Spirit to the Umma and the Return of ‘Rationality’ to the Leaders: The Positive Aspects of Legitimizing Occupation.” Another read “Arab Summit is a Victory for the American-Zionist Orgy.”

Now there were a minority of Arab commentators who, not coincidentally, wrote in papers published in Europe such as Al-Hayat, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat and Al-Quds Al-Arabi, who urged the Palestinians to extend a hand to the left in Israel, to resort to civil disobedience and peaceful protests similar to those led by Mahatma Gandhi during the struggle for freedom in India. Others said that we should beware of those Arabs demonstrating in the streets because Islamists and other unsavory characters may get involved and use these demonstrations for their own particular ends. These commentators represent a minority of views and they were attacked bitterly and harshly by a number of Arab commentators, particularly the Islamists. Fahmy Howeidi, a prominent Islamist, recently wrote the definitive scathing critique of these commentators.

Let me now shift to the American media. All of you know that reporters, all reporters, carry with them their own cultural
baggage wherever they go. That cultural baggage usually colors their coverage. This is true for Americans who work in the Middle East and try to interpret the Arab world for the West. The same holds for reporters like me who come from the other side to this country and try to interpret American society and American politics for the Arab world.

However, I must admit—and I have been watching this for a quarter of a century—that coverage of the Arab and Muslim world has improved tremendously. Major publications such as Time magazine, the Los Angeles Times, the Christian Science Monitor and others have published balanced, fair and even sympathetic articles on Arab and Muslim issues. Indeed, the coverage in general has improved, even in those publications whose editorials (and columnists) are very supportive of Israel, such as the New York Times and the Washington Post. However, in times of crisis such as these, some of the negative images and old stereotypes are dusted up and resurrected, bringing to mind the French adage: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." This is, to me, a continuing work in progress.

Every time I think we are reaching a higher level of understanding, I am struck by the ease with which people resurrect the old stereotypes, assumptions and images. That is why it is sometimes useful to talk about skewed coverage or stereotypes or negative images that emanate from prejudices or from the laziness of the reporters. We must also draw a distinction between these aspects, which can be dealt with through education and engagement, and those that arise from malicious intent. And malicious intent has a place in American media, not necessarily among reporters, but in the commentaries and editorial pages of American newspapers. Many reporters allow the Israelis, in situations like this, to frame and conceptualize the issues at hand, using their words, their terminology, and their definitions. The Israelis refer to Palestinians demonstrating against occupation as "rioters" or, even worse, as "mobs." Those terms are taken as accurate by many reporters and journalists who should know better.

Here let me backtrack a little. There has been a lot of talk about those two Israeli soldiers that were captured in Ramallah and killed. Now, there is nothing worse than a mob scene. There are two great mob scenes in literature in which only a number of people were killed, but the ferocity of their descriptions of a mob is really awesome. Those of you who remember A Tale of Two Cities, by Charles Dickens, will recall the incredible mob scene I am referring to. There is another mob scene in Emile Zola's Germinal which describes the death of one man at the hands of a bunch of unbelievably angry women. When you read these descriptions of a mob, it is truly frightening. What happened to the Israeli soldiers in Ramallah was classic mob "justice," and I have no problem saying it was politically counterproductive and morally indefensible. But when people demonstrate against tanks and helicopters, and they are caught up in a classic situation of occupation and resistance, then when you refer to them as "rioters" you are demeaning them, and when you refer to them as "mobs" you are insulting them.

When you read about the two Israeli soldiers (I don't care whether they were members of the special unit used to hunt Palestinians—though there is probably a great deal of credence to that charge—you do not kill people held in custody) in the American media, you read words like lynching, murder, barbaric, brutal, and savage. These
words were used in describing the events in Ramallah on that day, despite the explanation of the fact that the local police tried to prevent them. The point is that these terms are not used in any context to describe the killing of many Palestinian civilians. Many of these civilians were killed in cold blood or physically tortured by settlers.

So, only Arabs engage in rampages and mobs. Israelis do not do that. Again, that is the problem with the coverage. I have no problem saying that what happened in Ramallah was a mob act, but you cannot appropriate this kind of language in describing the actions of one party, especially when what we are dealing with here is resistance to an occupying power.

We all watched in horror the death of Mohammad Al-Durra. His last moments were seen by millions of people, reported not only in the region, but around the world and here in the United States. The description used at the time was that poor Mohammad Al-Durra was caught in a “crossfire”—such a nice, neutral term. Again, the judgement was that it was not a killing but a crossfire.

When the Palestinians are mowed down in the streets, they are killed by “security forces.” Again, this is as neutral as can be. Haram Al-Sharif is the Temple Mount. Although many reporters are now using the two terms, as they should, Haram Al-Sharif apparently has no place in the editorials of the Washington Post, which insists on referring to that area as the Temple Mount only.

Recently, you have heard the news of sniper acts in the fighting around Bet Jala, which is a Palestinian town close to Jerusalem, and a so-called “Israeli neighborhood,” according to the Washington Post, called Gilo. Once again, the term “neighborhood” is a neutral term. This is, in fact, an Israeli settlement built on land captured and occupied in 1967. Land that was confiscated from the Palestinians. Again, this is an issue of moral equivalence. Bet Jala has been there for God knows how many centuries and Gilo is a settlement built under occupation. This is reminiscent of the controversy in the days of Netanyah regarding the “housing project” that Netanyah wanted to build in Har Homa.

Everyone, of course, remembers that so-called housing project, which is again a neutral term that does not offend the sensibilities of Americans. That housing project was a settlement on Jabal Abu Gheit, but when we say that this is a housing project being built in an Israeli neighborhood of Har Homa, the average American feels that “those crazy Palestinians” are irrational people. When you say it is a settlement built on expropriated land in a Palestinian area called Jabal Abu Ghneim, you have a different reality. I remember at the time, Arab

Occupation itself is inherently violent. It is built on a structure of coercion, and rarely if ever is that structure broken except under pressure.
protests forced some in the American media to reevaluate their language. Reporters were asked to refer to the area as "Har Homa" as the Israelis describe it or Jabal Abu Ghneim as the Arabs describe it. This is like the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif situation. The next time someone asks you "What's in a name?" and quotes Shakespeare, tell him "everything." That is really the issue.

The worst offense, as far as I'm concerned, is this moral equivalence game that is being played. We see kids with slinghots being equated with the heavily armed Israeli military machine. We see the occupied being equated with the occupier, as if this dichotomy of occupied and occupier is being entered into with the agreement of both sides. People tend to forget that occupation itself is inherently violent, that it is built on a structure of coercion, and rarely if ever is that structure of coercion broken except under pressure. We can talk about all kinds of pressure, from violent means to civil disobedience, but the point is that that is the basic structure there, and that context is lacking in the coverage. It is outrageous and, if the situation were not so tragic, laughable.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and National Security Advisor Sandy Berger stated on television that the Israelis are in a "state of siege"—that the Palestinians, the occupied, are besieging the Israelis, their occupiers. Very few people raise an eyebrow about this incredibly crude version of blaming the victim. George Orwell is alive and well, not only in Israel and the editorial rooms of some major American papers, but maybe at the seventh floor of the State Department.

In conclusion, let me just reiterate that I think most of these reporters do a very good job, and are thoughtful and professional. The real problem is in the editorial rooms and among commentators and columnists. Here, the level of poison is unbelievable. As in previous times of crisis, the usual suspects—what we call "Israel's amen corner," people like Charles Krauthammer, George Will and Michael Kelly—have rushed to work to clean up Israel's tarnished image. Krauthammer alleges that Palestinians are deliberately sending their children to be mowed down by Israeli soldiers to get the world's sympathy. George Will, who I have to say is a gifted writer, alleges that Arafat's behavior is similar to Hitler's. Michael Kelly tells us that the Palestinians do not want peaceful coexistence with Israel, and they want the Jews dead or gone.

In these commentaries the sense of proportion is forgotten, words lose their meanings and concepts are turned upside down. There are others, even more shrill voices, such as Cal Thomas and R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. These people have a long history of savaging Islam and Islamic culture, and they are at work again. They are beyond redemption.

Even worse than that, the editorials that have appeared in some of the major papers like the New York Times and the Washington Post are full of inaccuracies. They are not bound by reality, even asserting such outlandish claims that the Israelis did not renege on their agreements to withdraw, or to end settlements and so forth. We see editorial headlines (in the Washington Post) like "Despair in Israel." Where have the vast majority of the hundreds of casualties been? Why don't we see "Despair in Gaza" or "Despair in Nablus"? When you read editorials like this, you enter a zone of despair and think of the old French adage: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."  ♦
Luncheon Address
Ambassador Nabil Fahmy

We have a difficult subject and a difficult situation before us. I have been doing this for quite some time and I cannot remember a time when my sense of frustration has reached the level of what it is today. There was a time previously when I really was perplexed about how to keep the process going. As a professional diplomat you learn how to keep processes going, you come up with ideas, and you push for any kind of optimism. We have our own set of gimmicks as to how to keep people talking. Today it is even more difficult, I have to say, because the issue is not about the process but about keeping the hope for peace, the belief in peace, sustainable in the Middle East. It is frustrating because it is a commitment my own country has made for many years and we still stand by it. It is a commitment we have been trying to continue. That is my first point, and I want you to take my comments, as hard as they may sound, in that context.

My second point is that for a number of years I have been perplexed and occasionally dumbfounded about why it is that America’s interests in the Middle East, particularly in the Arab world, are always a function of something else rather than just its relations with the Arab world itself. I am not going to go back over the long historical context, but I will talk a little about the post-World War II era, which coincides with the beginning of the Middle East crisis as we know it today. The United States’s role in the Arab world really started with the demise of the British Empire and the U.S. inheriting its role in the region. After that, the focus was on how the United States acts and how it preserves its interest as a function of the Cold War, in the context of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Third, there has been the Arab-Israeli conflict. Again, what I am discussing here is the American interest in the Arab world per se. It is probably academically more correct to discuss all of the Middle East but we do not have time today.

Throughout these different stages up until the present, we have always had the oil factor as a significant element. We have also had the issue of American security interests, both as a global power and as the only superpower. However, neither oil nor American security interests were ever the top priority. At least they were not perceived as such in the eyes of laymen here in America or in the Middle East. They were always there, but different degrees of emphasis and importance were placed on them at different times. If you look at the oil embargo, at one point it was quite prominent. However, in essence, Arab-American relations have always been a function of something else, and that is where the problem is. That is why I find it so difficult to deal with the situation today. This misplaced emphasis is where I think that a real American rethinking, if there is to be a rethinking, has to be focused.

Nabil Fahmy is Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United States.
This is not just my opinion. Let me refer to something that Ambassador Ned Walker said yesterday at the Middle East Institute. He referred to the ignorance about Islam in the United States and the ignorance about Judaism in the Arab world. What relates to the discussion here really is the ignorance toward Islam. The fact is that most of the Arab world is Muslim. It is not entirely Muslim, but most of it is. If you do not understand Islam, you do not understand the Arab world. Likewise, if you do not understand the Arab world and Islam, you do not understand many other countries and regions in the world. So, you have a clear motive for understanding the Arab world, what it is, and what your interests in it are. This motive is important on its own merits, and not as a function of something else or a tangent on another element in your priorities. Furthermore, it is important to understand that part of the world, not only for your interests in the Middle East, but also for your interests and responsibilities as a global power.

The point to be added to this, and again I am shying away from entering into the Middle East crisis per se, is that if you look at demographics, the Middle East—the Arab world, Israel and Iran—will have 191 million people by the year 2010 within the age bracket of 16 and 39. This will be equal to the total population, in that same bracket, of France, Britain, America and Germany combined. In 2010, we will have in the Middle East the same number of people between 16 and 39 as in all of these industrialized countries. Now look at that from whatever angle pleases you: business, technology, anthropology, security or culture. It is a mass that is going to affect you whether you like it or not. It is going to affect your interests and you had better understand it because there is no way in this global world that you will be able to live without seeing its influence. However, there is also a tremendous opportunity for you to influence it positively if a greater understanding exists.

Yesterday, I was watching the news and I was amused in a pleasant way to look at CNN’s coverage of the Arab-American community in Michigan and the influence that 40,000 registered voters of Arab-American origin might have on the presidential elections. Now let’s not get dreamy-eyed but, except for the time of the Oklahoma bombing—during which the blame was originally put on someone of “Middle Eastern origin”—I haven’t seen CNN focus so much on anything that was Arab but unrelated to the peace process. Add to that your Muslim community. The Muslim community in the United States today is conservatively estimated at six million. It is a substantial number of people, and if you talk to them, they will tell you much. You have to understand them to understand the region. America cannot isolate itself from the region anymore. The region is not only there; it is also here now.

The most recent example of a lack of understanding was the shock you felt here in America about two things. First, why in the world did Arafat reject Barak’s proposals at Camp David that the U.S. felt were very forthcoming? Second, what is this reaction we are seeing now on the ground, not only in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza but throughout the Arab world? It is a bit strange that a superpower with your resources, your wealth and with the nature of your own communities would be surprised by something like this, and that
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you do not understand the real feelings expressed in the streets.

Again, at the risk of being completely undiplomatic, more often than not over the years when we have mentioned Arab public opinion it was not taken seriously in the West. It did not exist, it was not a serious element or it was the responsibility of the leaders of Egypt and the Arab world to manage the feelings and concerns of the public in a manner consistent with their strategic objectives vis-à-vis the West. What you have seen over the past several weeks, as violent and tragic as it has been, is just the most recent example of something that you have to understand much more. If you do not, ultimately your own interests will be seriously affected.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have been brought here by the present Arab-Israeli predicament and the Middle East conflict as it is today, particularly the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Let me move on to that because I believe it is of more interest to you. I made the point of starting with this small introduction because I think that it is something America has to look at seriously for its own interests and for our interests. The more you understand us, the more we understand you, the more we interact. Whether or not we implement Sharm Al-Sheikh or whether or not we pursue the peace process, we are going to be faced by this reality and we will interact with you. The current level of misunderstanding is appalling, whether in the U.S. or in the Arab world.

On the peace process, I started by saying that I am more frustrated now than at any point before. The situation today is more dangerous than it has ever been before. This is not an exaggeration. In fact, it is an understatement, the reason being that more people today are questioning whether peace is lost. That view is prevalent in the Arab world and I know it is a question that has come out of Israel quite often. It is not an issue of whether peace is possible with Barak, if you ask an Arab, or whether peace is possible with Arafat, if you ask an Israeli. The questions that are coming up—which are much more dangerous than the previous ones—are whether peace is possible with Israelis or whether peace is possible with Arabs.

In the past, the issue was how to preserve the process, not peace. I could argue with my own constituency, in trying to convince them to be a little more patient and to work the process, that, yes, in our minds the Israelis may have made the wrong decision at that point in time in their choice of political leadership. This reflected a certain trend in the government, which was not supportive of peace, and we had to work within the system until the Israelis elected someone who was more receptive to the peace process. The situation today is that we have a government in Israel that was elected on a peace mandate, which is considered by many to be the most modern and progressive government in Israel—the government that could provide peace with the Arabs. I do not have an argument to persuade Arab moderates to wait anymore when they ask, “If we cannot do it with this Israeli government, who can we do it with?” Accordingly, the issue does not have to do with personalities but with the very essence of peace. This is a much more dangerous situation than we have faced for many years.

Let me take you to Camp David and try to translate these frustrations and misperceptions into some concrete examples.
I grant you that Prime Minister Barak presented proposals there that were more forthcoming and progressive than any Israeli government previously. I do not doubt that. In the eyes of Israelis and some others, he went further than anyone could imagine. But it is also true that to place the blame on Arafat as the reaction for failure is a reflection, more than anything else, of the lack of understanding of the serious concerns and interests that Arabs have about the Israeli occupation, and particularly the issue of East Jerusalem.

It is not a function of Barak being more progressive than someone else that will solve the problem. It is a function of whether both sides are ready to accept real compromises that will take into account the concerns of others and not impinge on their rights. A real compromise is not halfway between right and wrong. That is not a compromise, but a reflection of the balance of power and those things change. If we want to look for a sustainable, final solution, we must have a compromise that is a balance between the rights of all, not between right and wrong. What was presented to President Arafat was not anywhere near what he could accept, particularly regarding the issue of Jerusalem. Naturally, he said no.

I disagree with those, even within my own community, who say that Camp David was too early because Arafat was not ready. I disagree with them. That was not the reason Camp David failed. We all know that Arafat was not enthusiastic about going to Camp David at that point in time. I have spoken to him before and since, and his position was not that he was not ready, but that the Israelis were not prepared to offer, on the table, at that point in time, an agreement that he could accept and that would sustain his concerns. The progression of Israeli thought and the evolution of the Israeli body politic was not yet right to provide such an offer. That is why he was hesitant to have Camp David then.

Needless to say, Arafat was ready, and I assume he remains ready, to take into account Israeli concerns regarding security and free access to religious sites. This is where creativity and bridging proposals would really help. He is ready to take into account Israeli concerns, but he is not ready to give up Palestinian rights. The international community has established a certain set of rights for settling this matter. In essence, these are the “land for peace” formula and the basic principles of resolution 242, which address Arab concerns and the Israeli right to exist in the region within secure borders. They establish a parameter, which is basically the Arab lands occupied by Israel on June 4, 1967. This is the territorial parameter tied to international law, and this is where the solution is.

Now, if you have to take into account specific concerns given the nature of the region, all of this can be looked at—whether security issues, cooperative arrangements in using property, water arrangements, etc.—but let’s be serious. There cannot be a solution if such concerns contradict the very essence of the right that the Palestinians are looking to fulfill. They can be useful if they respond to Israeli concerns and the concerns of the Palestinians without violating the basic rights established by that parameter. The Palestinians, having already accepted the process, are already only negotiating on 22 percent of the territory of mandate Palestine. To say that Arafat did not compromise at Camp David is misleading because it is not a symmetrical situation, politically, militarily or in terms of rights and principles. We cannot solve it without looking at Israel’s concerns. I fully support and confirm the
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need for the Arabs to look at legitimate Israeli concerns in order to put this issue to rest. However, this must be done without violating Arab rights—Arab rights as accepted by Arabs and Israelis, with the point of departure being 1967.

Egypt, in particular, bore the brunt of much criticism following Camp David for not being helpful and not having done as much as some would have accepted. Well, we have been around for several thousand years. We are always the subject of some criticism and it doesn’t really bother us except when it is misguided. After Camp David, we have seen a series of meetings and discussions in which Egypt and others have taken part, the objective of which has been to prevent the crisis caused by Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Haram from becoming what it is today and shattering the very essence of peace.

Fifteen days ago, we suggested a meeting at Sharm Al-Sheikh. The Palestinians came. The Americans came. Israel did not. Things got worse. Decisions were taken and ultimatums were thrown around by Israel. It kept getting worse. Then there was the excessive use of force. There is a lesson to be drawn from the events of the last few weeks. On the one hand, in spite of everything we have witnessed, nobody can conclude that force is going to solve this. Despite the overwhelming imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians, Israeli force cannot control them. The Palestinians go out everyday. Thirteen-year-olds are caught up in a completely irrational but legitimate quest of throwing stones at helicopters to try to oppose the occupation. We have thirteen-year-olds throwing stones at helicopters, and it will continue. If you think that this imbalance of power should make the Palestinians rational and agreeable, then you are blind and have been blind for a long time. The solution is not in the balance of power, more force, or more ultimatums. It is not in thinking, “I have given up on this and I don’t have to give anymore, and if you throw stones I will kill you.” You can do that, but that is not where the solution is. The solution is trying to respond to the legitimate rights of the other side.

I openly criticize the series of steps taken by Israel since Sharon’s visit to the Haram. The policy has not been one of a party committed to the peace process but one of a party that is once again saying, “I am stronger and I can respond to this in a military way.” It is a philosophy of power rather than a commitment to pursue the resolution of the issue. Once again, might will not solve this. Peace will not be based on who is stronger, but on a legitimate compromise, where we preserve the rights of each party.

What are the Arabs’ thoughts? What is the Arab response? Everybody is criticizing the Arab world—Arafat didn’t do this, the Arab summit didn’t do this, etc. Without a doubt, the Arab world is furious. I contend that the Arab street is not satisfied with the results of the Arab summit, even though the summit results are serious results. They should be heard very carefully.

But what was the response? The Arab side still believes in peace. Arabs did not take a time-out. I would like to have seen the reaction if the Arabs had said, “We are taking a time-out on peace.” Arabs did not say that we are going to take a unilateral measure and decide this. At the summit, the Arabs stated where we think the blame lies and pointed out the implications of this crisis, but we made it clear that we are still striving to achieve peace. However, you should not kid yourselves. The struggle to promote a
peaceful solution is a very hard sell in the Arab world today. Unless we safeguard and work on this, it is not going to be something that people can continue to pursue. I say this as a representative of a country that believes in peace. There is no hesitation about peace. We will continue to pursue peace, but we would be dishonest if we tried to belittle the crisis that we face today.

Egypt hosted Sharm Al-Sheikh II in October, in spite of all the violence—and we are the same country criticized for not doing enough. Why Egypt? Why do we have to do it all the time? Why always an Arab country? Then some people question whether Arabs believe in peace. The decisions taken at Sharm Al-Sheikh were difficult for Arafat and I am sure they were difficult for Prime Minister Barak, but they must be respected. We cannot continue to move this process forward if violence continues, and there will be violence if there is day-to-day, minute-by-minute confrontation between the occupying forces and the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank.

Allow me two final statements on the role of the United States. At Sharm Al-Sheikh, you saw an effort put together with tremendous American energy and Egypt’s willingness to put itself on the line. Ultimately, it came to fruition with the aid of other international parties including the United Nations and the European Union, who committed themselves to putting the meeting together and endorsed it and the results. I was asked two days after the summit, “Does this mean that the future for the process is more unreal? Does this dim in the American role?” I do not think that it does. I have never thought of the U.S. role and the international role as two mutually exclusive suggestions.

In fact, I call for an even more active, more energetic, more progressive U.S. role. I call openly for a dramatic American step to put forward proposals, once violence has stopped, that will truly attempt to lay a foundation for resolving the Palestine-Israel track. Now, as I said in the beginning, true bridging proposals are not halfway between right and wrong. The United States is the only superpower, and the current American president has been committed to the process. The U.S. should use these facts to put proposals on the table that reflect not necessarily what it wants, but what is called for to bridge the gap between the parties. It is not for the U.S. to agree or disagree on the issues. It is not their call. It is the call of the street in the region—be it Arab or Israeli or Palestinian—as represented by their leaders. The U.S. is not the jury, the defender or the prosecutor. The U.S. role cannot be only a facilitator.

The United States has to put on the table proposals that it thinks would move the parties closer to the legal basis from which Arabs and Israelis could agree to solve these issues. Creativity is vital in coming to terms with how to bridge gaps between the parties without violating their legal rights, and while providing arrangements that deal with the special concerns of all the parties. These should be fundamental bridging proposals—not a function of what is possible, but of what is right. Thus, it is up to Arabs and Israelis to say yes or no.

Contrary to what many are calling for, I support a more active but more substantial American role, not only focusing on the process but on the final fundamental points of a peace settlement. I know people say it is not realistic, but this is the role the United States should be playing, given its primary position in the world today.