
The Middle East After the Gulf War

By

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It is a distinct privilege for me to make my first appearance before this distinguished subcommittee. With your permission, I would like to comment on the historic achievements of the Madrid peace conference and describe what the road ahead of the Arab-Israeli peace process looks like. Further, I will make a few comments on the situation in Iraq. Of course, I am prepared to address these and whatever other issues the members of the subcommittee may wish to raise during the subsequent discussion.

ARAB/ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

In his opening remarks at the peace conference in Madrid, President Bush termed the event a "mission of hope." With the opening of the conference, the Middle East turned an important historical page—away from the intractability and insolubility of this over-4-decades-old conflict and toward the achievement of genuine, comprehensive peace and reconciliation between Israel and its Arab neighbors through direct dialogue and negotiations.

The hope to which the President referred during the opening session of the conference, in fact, turned to reality just 4 days later on November 3 when direct, bilateral negotiations were launched between Israeli delegations and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, a Lebanese delegation, and a Syrian delegation.

Never before had there been direct, bilateral negotiations between Israel and each of its Arab and Palestinian neighbors, and never again will there be such a taboo against such face-to-face contacts. In his closing press conference in Madrid, Secretary Baker termed these developments a "good start." Indeed, it was. For over 12 hours on November 3, Israeli and Arab delegates debated the issues across the table of negotiations.

To be sure, the road ahead will not be easy to navigate. Fundamental differences separate the parties, and those differences will be hard fought at the negotiating table. But they will be fought with words and position papers and policy statements, and, hopefully, no longer with weapons and violence.

The road to Madrid was long and difficult. Secretary Baker traveled to the Middle East eight times between March and October to fulfill the promise of the initiative launched by President Bush last March in his address to a joint session of Congress. Many, many hours were spent in discussion with key Middle East figures—Prime Minister Shamir of Israel, President Assad of Syria, King Hussein of Jordan, President Mubarak of Egypt, President Hrawi of Lebanon, and Palestinians like Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi—in an effort to understand their concerns, examine the differences between their positions, evolve bridging positions to overcome problems, and develop the terms of reference for the peace conference and negotiations. Enormous political

strains were placed on each party by this effort. Persistent efforts were undertaken by extremists to undermine the search for peace by acts of terror and in southern Lebanon. Yet, throughout, Secretary Baker found the parties ready to engage and ready to confront the difficult decisions required to get to the negotiating table.

Important and far-reaching agreements among the parties permitted this process to proceed.

- The parties agreed that the goal is a comprehensive peace settlement achieved through direct negotiations based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 538.
- They agreed on two negotiating tracks, between Israel and the Arab states, and between Israel and the Palestinians.
- They agreed that the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians would be conducted in phases, with the initial phase focusing on interim self-government arrangements and the second phase focusing on a permanent settlement.
- They agreed that the direct negotiations would be launched by a peace conference—co-sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union—and that the conference would not be able to impose solutions, veto agreements, make decisions, or vote.
- They agreed that Palestinians would participate in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, and that Palestinians who participate would be those who accept to negotiate on two tracks and in phases and who accept to live in peace with Israel.
- They agreed to invite the European Community and Egypt to participate alongside the co-sponsors.
- They agreed to invite the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Maghreb Union, and the United Nations to each send an observer to the conference.

THREE CRITICAL ISSUES

In translating these agreements into a workable peace conference and negotiations, we were also reminded by the parties of the central substantive issues which need to be addressed in order to resolve the conflict. In his remarks to the peace conference, Secretary Baker noted that the parties themselves had identified three critical issues.

- The parties had expressed a yearning for peace, a desire to live in mutually satisfying relationships with neighbors, and to have those relations characterized by peace treaties, diplomatic relations, economic relations, cultural ties, and political dialogue.
- The parties emphasized the importance of land and the desire of peoples to exercise authority and political governance over territories they consider part of their patrimony.
- And the parties stressed the need for security. That is, the requirement that people live free of fear and the obligation of governments to do their best to protect their citizens.

Listening to these views expressed by the parties, the Secretary made clear our belief that progress toward a comprehensive settlement on all fronts would be possible only if all the issues were put on the table. This is our assessment of what needs to be done to ensure progress in the negotiations.

Our upbeat mood after the conference is tempered only by the sober realization that much hard work and difficult procedural and substantive decisions lie ahead. The first issue the parties face is the venue of the bilateral negotiations. Before Madrid, there had not been agreement on where the talks would be held. The parties held different views and still do. As the Secretary made clear in Madrid, we hope the parties can resolve this issue on their own. If they cannot, we stand ready soon to make proposals that will help get the negotiations resumed as quickly as possible.

We are also working to ensure a successful start in the multilateral negotiations to which we attach much importance. As you know, the invitation to the conference indicated that those parties who wish to participate should convene to organize multilateral negotiations on such key topics for the peace, security, and prosperity of the region as arms control and regional security, economic development, refugees, water, the environment, and the like. We will begin shortly to consult with parties in the region and outside in order to plan for the organizational meeting of these negotiations. We are gratified that a significant number of regional parties have already stated publicly their intention to participate in these talks.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

The role of the United States throughout this process will be that of an honest broker, a catalyst for peace, and a driving force to help ensure that negotiations work. Both the President and the Secretary have reiterated their personal commitments to play an active role in helping the process succeed and that we are in it for the long haul. The United States maintains long-standing positions on peace process issues that remain the basis of our own policy. But we also know well from experience that the role of the mediator often benefits as much from the non-articulation of one's own positions, as from their repetition. When needed, we will state our views; and when needed, we will work quietly with the parties, out of the public view to help build trust and agreement between them.

I would like to add a final word about the most important, and often most neglected facet, of the peace process—namely, the human dimension.

This is a conflict between people. It is a conflict in which people have urgent and basic needs—to live more securely, to live free of fear, to live with dignity, to live in peace.

There are practical prescriptions available to meet the urgent needs of the peoples of the Middle East. Each party can and must think about and adopt whatever measures are possible to reach out to peoples on the other side of the conflict. The parties, themselves, know best which actions would have the greatest impact. They, themselves, know how important these steps would be for their own constituencies and, thus, also how important they would be for the other side. They, themselves, know that the formulas of negotiations will have little meaning if the people of the region lose faith in what must be a process of peace and reconciliation.

We offer no specific prescriptions for the parties to follow—either with regard to the substance of the negotiations or to the confidence-building steps that should be adopted by all sides. We do call upon all parties to avoid unilateral acts which might prejudice or even threaten the process, and we share the hope that the same courage which regional leaders have brought to the tough decisions on the peace conference and the start of negotiations will also be applied to the pressing human problems that need to be confronted.

IRAQ

Concerning the situation in Iraq, the victory of the US-led coalition in Desert Storm reversed Saddam Hussein's aggression against his neighbors. Ever since, the international community has

shown its determination to ensure that Iraq complies with all its UN-mandated obligations. We and our coalition partners remain committed to that end. In so doing, we bear no animus toward the Iraqi people who have suffered too long under a brutal regime. They deserve new leadership.

President Bush has made it clear that sanctions will continue as long as the ruthless dictator Saddam Hussein remains in power. At the same time, we will continue to broaden our contacts with the Iraqi opposition and to support the emergence of an Iraqi Government representative of Iraq's pluralistic society including the Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds. In fact, on my very first day as Assistant Secretary, I met with a delegation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front, which included Assyrian, Turcoman, and Kurdish representatives. In summary, and as President Bush has said, we are prepared to work with a successor regime in the interest of the Iraqi people.

Sadly, Saddam Hussein continues to try to blame the international sanctions for the continuing suffering of the Iraqi people which he himself has caused. The facts are quite different.

First, medicine has never been denied to the Iraqis by the international community, and UN sanctions on food shipments ended in March. While assuring that his clique is provided for, Saddam Hussein is cynically denying food and medicine to the Iraqi people and is trying to fix the blame on the sanctions.

Second, the mechanism to help the Iraqi people is in place—all he has to do is use it. He has not done so because the UN-mandated monitoring regime would make it difficult for him to manipulate the flow of food to the Iraqi people.

Third, the continuing deprivation in Iraq is the result of Saddam's deliberate refusal to accept UN Resolutions 706 and 712—namely food for oil—and his callous policy of diverting supplies away from those who oppose him.

Once again, Saddam Hussein is prepared to sacrifice the Iraqi people for the sake of hanging on to his own, personal power. As we maintain all possible political and economic pressure on this brutal regime, we will work with the international community to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people through implementation of Security Council Resolutions 688, 706, and 712.

We are confident, that Saddam's attempt will fail. He miscalculated the will of the international community over his invasion of Kuwait. If he thinks he can fool the world with a shell game with food and medicine, he will have miscalculated badly, once again.