



Why Peace is Possible – And Why America Should Care

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America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace*

I want to talk openly and candidly about several issues, including America's Middle-East policy in pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace. For 25 years I had the honor and privilege of providing advice to six U.S. Secretaries of State. Sometimes the advice was good and sometimes it was bad and I now, on reflection, believe that there ought to be term limits imposed on advisors to secretaries and presidents, particularly when they don't succeed because as I approach my sixtieth birthday I am absolutely persuaded that the world's most compelling ideology is not national, it's not democracy, it's not even capitalism—and I come from a family of real estate developers—the world's most compelling ideology is success, because success breeds power and it breeds followers and constituents and sadly America is not succeeding.

When I began my diplomatic career I was a believer in three basic propositions: Number one, there was a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. There was no perfect justice this side of heaven. Nobody gets 100 percent. Whether it's in your personal life, your professional life, your business life, nobody gets one hundred percent. Life is a balance, a balance between the way the world is and the way you want it to be. But I believed there was this balance and that Arabs and Israelis could find an equitable and durable solution of their conflict.

Second, the only way this solution could ever be found is through the long, slow and perfect process of negotiations, something I came to put an enormous amount of faith in. I'm not a religious person but negotiations became an article of faith, and as an American I began to worship on the altar of what I call the "split the difference" mentality. For many years I believed that the world's problems could be resolved through negotiation.

Finally, America had a very special role to play. These three propositions: there was a solution, negotiations could bring that about, and America had a critical role to play, were articles of faith.

Sadly, after a quarter of a century of struggling in this enterprise all three of these propositions are at sea. I'm not prepared to give up on them and I don't think anybody has the right to give up on them. I have a 28 year old daughter and a 25 year old son and I cannot give up on the future, mortgage it, and say to them, "Well, it will never happen." But, I'm much more skeptical now about the possibility.

I resigned from the State Department in January 2003 after working for two years for Colin Powell. He was the last Secretary of State for whom I worked; I resigned not because I'd lost faith in the power of the American diplomacy. I resigned because I concluded, rightly, that the

road toward Arab-Israeli peace was going to be a very long and bumpy one and those 25 years were enough. The republic had benefited enough from 25 years of my particular advice on this subject.

So, I went out to run a non-profit, Seeds of Peace, which brought young people from areas of conflict together. It was a wonderful three-year opportunity and it reaffirmed some of my faith in the possibilities for the future. But as I watched from the sidelines, particularly in the years after 9/11, I grew increasingly concerned that my country was failing badly in a part of the world in which it could no longer afford to fail. Because the truth is the greatest threat to America will not come from the ascending China. I don't care how competitive the Chinese are or what kind of economic and military power they may come to represent they will not provide and present the most critical threat to this country. And it will not come as a threat from an economically powerful Europe, united now more than ever before. And it isn't going to come from a former Soviet Union seeking to regain its past glory and bitter that it is no longer the great power that it once was. These are all important challenges for this nation's foreign policy but they are not the key challenge. The key challenge to this country will come from a region of this world which is angry, feeling humiliated, with feelings of enormous rage, a dysfunctional region where there is a tremendous authority deficit, in which small groups, every day, challenge central authority and make a mockery of that authority and of American military and political power. This place is Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. We're like Gulliver, wandering around in a world of small powers, small tribes really that we don't really understand.

This region is a region that will give rise to the possibility of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. I read all the intelligence in the months in the run up to this war, I left in January 2003, and I was absolutely persuaded, based on what I saw, that Saddam Hussein possessed stock piles of chemical and biological weapons—no nuclear. Every other intelligence service in the world, the Brits, the French, the Russians, and the Israelis, all concluded the same thing. And yet Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction. The extraordinary thing is the one country that could cross the nuclear threshold on the watch of this president over the last eight years we have unwittingly aided and abated, Iran. We've eliminated the Taliban—not really but we have weakened it—we've taken out Saddam, Iran's mortal enemy, and we've enabled the Iranians to extend their power to Hezbollah and to Hamas into the Arab-Israeli arena.

So, there are many challenges and many, many threats out there. We are not responsible for this predicament in the main. These challenges come from a region over which we have very little control and very little experience. But as I watched, these seven years, it seemed to me that we were making matters worse. Why? How come?

The more I thought about it the more I thought that we had imposed on ourselves two constraints. First of all we didn't pay attention to the past. I'm a historian by training and I have to say that I'm a real historian. I have a PhD in history, I wrote a couple of history books. I was taught to look at the past and study it and take it seriously, and yet throughout my government career I didn't pay any attention to the past. I paid attention to my inbox and the challenges that were on my desk during that day. There's a great British historian, A. J. P. Taylor who says that the only lesson of history is that there are no lessons. Well, it's a very cute phrase worth, I think, a few hours of thought but in large part it's too cute. History is a cruel and unforgiving teacher if you don't take it seriously at all. Earlier I asked the question "How many Americans were killed during the entire occupation of Japan? We occupied Japan for seven years from 1945 to 1952. Do you know how many Americans were killed in hostile actions by Japanese during that entire seven year period? Zero. Not ten, not five, zero. Not one American. Japan was a defeated

nation with a set of institutions that MacArthur built upon instead of dismantling and destroying. We learned very little from the past and it haunts us to this day.

Secondly, it seems to me that we didn't read the present the right way either. We Americans are unbelievable people in that we see the world the way we want it to be not the way it is. When I try to explain to people who don't live here who want to know what America is all about, why we behave the way we do abroad, I start with one basic fact. We are the only country, the only great power in the history of this world that has a degree of physical security in isolation—unparalleled. We have non-predatory neighbors to our north and our south, weak neighbors, neighbors who don't threaten us to the north and south and we have fish, literally fish, to our east and west. That single fact explains our optimism, my optimism, that all the problems in this world can be resolved. Why can't they be resolved? We are a people with a boundless spirit and a boundless sense of optimism. We're the only people in the history of the world whose political system is based on an idea and the idea is the primacy of the individual. That primacy of the individual means we can make ourselves into anything we want. We can change the world. We have that potential. It leads to our optimism. It also leads to a naiveté because we don't have a clue about what it's like to live on the knife's edge. We've never been occupied, except for a brief period in the early 19th century. We've never been invaded. Our inner cities may be in trouble, the gap between rich and poor may be growing, but even with 9/11 we don't know, we don't know what's it's like to court and confront these existential problems. We make the mistake because we believe the rest of the world is more or less like us. I used to make this mistake with Arabs and Israelis because they appeared to be like us.

I remember once I took my daughter to a movie – I live in Washington – and we went to see Sean Connery in *The Rock*. There weren't make people in the movie theatre, but I noticed that there were a lot of well-built guys talking into the lapels. Now, in Washington when you see somebody talking into their lapels you know that something's up. These are security guys. That means somebody is in the movie theatre. Sure enough eight or ten rows in front of us is King Hussein of Jordan. I worked with him and I know him and his wife, Queen Noor who was there. King Hussein was wearing a polo shirt and blue jeans and he's sitting in Bethesda, right outside of Washington, watching Sean Connery in *The Rock* and I'm thinking to myself and talking to my daughter, Jennifer, "This is extraordinary. Here's the King of Jordan. He's just like me and you. We're watching this movie." But this is not right. King Hussein was in Jerusalem when his grandfather, Abdullah, was assassinated. King Hussein presides, from on top of a volcano. Jordan, sandwiched between a militarily superior Israel, Iraq and a patronizing Saudi Arabia. King Hussein had to survive and he did a whole lot of things in order to survive. We're not like that. So, we persist in seeing the world the way we want it to be.

These two things really handicap us because if we don't read the past right and you don't look at the present the right way, how do you expect to have your policies come out the way they should come out? So I decided in a very un-Washingtonian-like manner that I was going to write a book that was clear and honest about why we succeeded and failed in one very important area, which is the pursuit of an Arab-Israeli peace. Now, in Washington you don't write a clear and honest book if you're running for something. I'm not running for anything. I had my time. I really like my new life so I could afford to be clear and honest—more honest than most. And that's what I've done. In addition to conveying a lot of antidotes I went out and interviewed every body that I could who I worked with and a lot of the people who came up before. With the exception of Bill Clinton, I saw all of our presidents, Jerry Ford before he died, Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush. We have nine living secretaries of state—I saw them all and the National Security Advisors and most of the diplomats and a lot of Arabs and Israelis. I wrote a chapter on domestic

politics in this book and went out and interviewed everybody who plays a role in that whole enterprise. A lot of American Jews, a lot of American Arabs. I saw every key Evangelical Christian I could find, including Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Gary Bauer, and I interviewed a lot of senators and congressmen in an effort to try to understand what is the role of domestic petitions.

Of the conclusions I came to, and I want to just briefly sum up a couple and then spend a little time talking about the current situation. The conclusions I came to are pretty depressing. Number one, our best years of Arab-Israeli diplomacy are behind us. Over the last 16 years our policy towards this region has been flawed. Don't kid yourself that this is a Republican problem. It's not a Republican problem, but it's also a Democratic problem. We've stumbled for eight years. I worked for Bill Clinton and his two secretaries of state during those years. He stumbled badly during those years in an effort to forge peace between the Arabs and Israelis. And in this administration we stumbled even worse at making war. Well, if you can't make peace and you can't make war, what kind of foreign policy do you have? It's one thing to alienate the peoples in the Middle East and succeed, but it's another thing to alienate the peoples in the Middle East and fail. We are not respected out there, we're not liked out there and for a great power we're not feared out there. It's coming at a very bad time because never before has the security of the continental United States been more intricately associated with this part of the world. I said to you that the threat to our national security would not come from China, the former Soviet Union or Europe. It has already come from this dysfunctional region. The organizing premise of a nation's foreign policy is to protect its homeland. If you can't protect your homeland you don't need a foreign policy. So, the Arab-Israeli issue is not the key to our interests but it resonates out in that region with an intensity and a ferocity that makes it extremely powerful and important.

We have not done a good job in managing. Casey Stengel, the Yankee manager, once said that the key to good management was keeping the nine guys who hate your guts away from the nine guys who haven't made up their minds. Now, I love that expression, and out in that region there are a lot of people who have not yet made up their minds about America. I don't believe in a clash of civilizations. I think there's a disturbingly large minority out there who, as the president asserts, hate us because we love freedom. But that's not why the majority of people don't like us in the world today. And, by the way, it's not the role of a great power to be loved. We're never going to be loved but who we are has to be reconciled with what we do. George Mitchell once said to me that in his years he never believed he'd have to go out and sell America. I feel the same way. Why is the gap between who we really are as a people, and how we are perceived, and how we behave, so large? Where did that come from? How did that happen? The gap has to be closed. I don't care who wins the next election, Republican or Democrat, the gap has to be closed and we have to be tougher and smarter about how we deal, particularly with this particular part of the world.

You've heard this notion of "hearts and minds," it's very popular. You go out and you appeal to someone's emotions, you win their hearts and then their minds come along. No. They have it backwards; it's minds and hearts. People aren't stupid. You can't take the box and put a bow on it, a new pretty bow on it, when the contents of the box remain the same.

We need a much different approach to this particular part of the world and the conclusions that I've reached in this book indicate that we really have to take this issue much more seriously. Laurence Summers, the former president of Harvard, said a lot of controversial things, but one thing he said which was absolutely true was, "In the history of the world nobody ever washed a rental car." Now, think about that. Of course, nobody is going to wash a rental car because you

care only about what you own. A president needs to invest and own an issue otherwise nobody is going to take the president seriously, not his own political supports or opponents, or the Arabs or the Israelis. The last time we really owned this issue and were tough enough and smart enough, was with the president's father and his very talented and able Secretary of State Jim Baker. I have this peace process hall of fame I created in the book. There are three Americans who get in and only three. Kissinger gets in for a masterful set of diplomacy in the wake of the 1973 October war; Jimmy Carter gets in for his brokering of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty and Jim Baker gets in for putting together the Madrid Peace Conference in October of 1991 which was the last significant act of successful diplomacy that we did.

Bill Clinton, for whom I worked for eight years and have tremendous empathy, wasn't tough enough, and George W. Bush, well, governing is about choosing, that's what it means to govern, and George W. Bush chose to different priorities. Both of them also mishandled our key and core relationship with the Israelis because both understood that we needed a special relationship with the Israelis in order to remain relevant but both allowed the special relationship to become exclusive and it has nothing to do with sacrificing Israel's interests. I'm constantly pummeled by American Jews because they think that this notion of not making the relationship with Israel exclusive is some how a prelude to sacrificing Israeli interests. Nonsense. The U.S. relationship with Israel is incredibly strong and solid. Israel is now the purview of millions of Evangelical Christians, not fundamentalists by the way, but Evangelical Christians, moderates as well as conservatives who have come to support Israel, because rightly or wrongly, there's the perception that the Israelis share our values. But both Clinton and Bush, in my judgment, lost sight of the fact that, yes, we need a special relationship with Israel but the alliance isn't exclusive.

There's a wonderful story about George W. Bush, when he was governor of Texas going to Israel on his first visit with three other Southern governors and he's up in the helicopter. I've taken the same ride with three Israeli prime ministers—it's very, very compelling—you go from the Israeli-Lebanese border to Sinai in 90 minutes and you see exactly how tiny a country this is. So, Sharon who was then foreign minister, a masterful guide, very compelling, a large, large historic figure and is explaining to Bush about the narrow width of the country and the president looks out the window and says, "Sharon, we got driveways in Texas that are longer than this country is wide." So, George W. Bush reacted instinctively. Bush was in awe of Sharon just as Clinton, a Democrat, was in awe of Prime Minister Rabin and then Prime Minister Barak.

There are elements of successful American diplomacy. I call them the four Ts. You have to be *tough*, you really do have to gain the *trust* of the Arab and Israelis, you have to be *tenacious*, you can't give up and you have to have a real sense of *timing*. You have to know how much you can actually get away with. You can't do too much like Bill Clinton at Camp David in July 2000; and you can't do something that's insufficient, like George W. Bush did most in his first administration and a fair amount in his second. The book gives a set of lessons designed really for the next president about how to manage this one issue.

Let me just conclude with a few comments about the current situation. Rarely have I seen the situation more complicated than the one that exists now. I guess you could argue that it's probably the worse environment for any serious Arab-Israeli peace making. The gaps between the Israelis and the Palestinians on their issues are very large. You don't have bold leaders; there are no more Rabins, Sadats, Begins, King Husseins. You have politicians who are prisoners of their constituencies not masters of their own politics and you have a peculiar problem on the Palestinian side. To use a common sense reference, Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall and broke into at least two different parts. You have Mahmoud Abbas, a good decent man, who does not

believe in violence who is nominally in control of the West Bank; and you have Hamas who's view of armed struggle and the solution is quite different and are really in control of Gaza and it's very hard to imagine how you get around this particular problem.

What we need is a much more serious strategy to manage this conflict, to demonstrate that we're committed to it, to hold each side accountable when in fact they do things that aren't in America's interest. And we need effective diplomacy to help them deal with the gaps that exists on issues like Jerusalem, borders, refugees and security. I think that there's a chance between now and the end of the year that these two leaders, Ehud Olmert, prime minister of Israel, and Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, could reach an agreement on paper, a text. As Samuel Goldman said, "An oral agreement isn't worth the paper it's written on." Samuel Goldman is right. We failed at Camp David in July 2000 because we didn't have a piece of paper and let the Israelis and Palestinians scare us into not putting one on the table. The problem is where the text, should they agree to it, meets the context the situation on the ground.

Let me close with another sad fact but I'm more or less uplifted by it. The first and last president to ever have an impact on me was Jack Kennedy. I was 13 when he was assassinated and that's a pretty sad comment, frankly. Kennedy described himself and he used a phrase that I think is critical, and if you take nothing else out of here tonight of what I've said take this because this really is a piece of wisdom, Kennedy described himself as an idealist without illusions. I submit to you that that is exactly where America has to be. We can never give up on the possibilities of making this world or any of these conflicts better, perhaps even resolving them, but as we go through this process, protecting our interests and maintaining our values, we really have to do it with our eyes open because the costs of not doing it that way are much too heavy for us to bear.

Thank you very much.

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