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Don't Despair -- Middle East Peace Is Still Possible By **Daniel Pipes**

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American and Israeli officials have finally admitted that the Middle East peace process is dead. As a result, Secretary of State James Baker asked the Israelis on Wednesday to lay down their realistic conditions for talking to the Palestinians. But rather than wait for them to move, Americans can get the ball rolling with some new ideas -- and here is one.

Stand back from the details of the Arab-Israeli conflict and a remarkable symmetry becomes apparent: Palestinians want from Israel what Israel wants from the Arab states: recognition and legitimacy. Thus, Palestinians seek concessions from Israel and Israel seeks concessions from the Arab states. Conversely, the Arab states try to avoid direct negotiations with Israel and Israel tries to avoid such negotiations with the Palestinians. This symmetry suggests a fruitful new approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For over 40 years, Israelis have striven to get the Arab states to accept first the existence and ultimately the legitimacy of a Jewish state in Palestine. This central goal of Israeli diplomatic and military policy has been crowned with partial success, including a peace treaty with Egypt and an acceptable working relationship with Jordan. But Hosni Mubarak of Egypt warned Israel that its actions could "blow up the peace march and put the region on the verge of a new bloody confrontation," while Saddam Hussein of Iraq threatened that "our fire shall devour one half of Israel." And the Arab summit just concluded in Baghdad was the most bellicose conclave in over a decade.

In public (in private is another matter entirely), Arabs insist that Israel must accept a Palestinian state on land now controlled by Israel. For decades, the Arabs have resorted to every form of pressure, from terrorism to diplomacy, to win this acceptance. Here, progress has been made. Israel recognized Palestinian rights at Camp David in 1991. The Palestinian cause is the most visible nationalist movement in the world, winning widespread sympathy (even in Israel itself). Yet like Israel's quest, the Arabs' is still unsuccessful. The PLO controls not an inch of Palestine.

We see before us a parallelism of failure and frustration: Israel cannot get what it wants from the Arab states, and the Palestinians cannot get what they want from Israel. This very parallelism potentially offers opportunity. Resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict entirely requires that both aspirations be addressed, so why not yoke them together?

As an honest broker, the U.S. government should link concessions to Israel by the Arab states with Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. That is, when the Arab states give something it wants, Israelis should then -- and only then -- be expected to give something in return to the Palestinians.

Trade-offs can be small or large. If, for example, the Saudis would end their economic boycott of Israel, Israelis could increase Palestinian access to underground water in the West Bank. Damascus might reduce the size of its standing army by 5% a year; in return, Jerusalem would cease to establish new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. If Saddam Hussein signs a peace treaty with Israel, Yasser Arafat would be invited to visit Jerusalem. And finally, when all the Arab states sign peace treaties with Israel, the Palestinians get their state.

These are merely hypothetical illustrations, for it is not possible to predict what concessions would be cut. It is possible to predict, however, that the parties would spend long months trying to find a just balance. The devil is in the detail; but that is fine, for hammering out a quid pro quo would be a constructive process, and one that could be extended to other issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the compensation of refugees, Arab recognition of Israel, the control of territories and even the disposition of Jerusalem.

Everyone would gain. The Arab states achieve what they say is their main goal, justice for the Palestinians. Israel gets peace. Palestinians have their state.

This new peace process bleaches out polemics. Rather than concentrate on hypothetical intentions (has Mr. Arafat really accepted Israel? Will the Israelis expel West Bank Jewish residents?), it focuses on practical matters of give-and-take. It places the burden of initiative squarely on the Arab states -- where it should be, for it is Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and the other capitals (and not Israelis or Palestinians) that ultimately decide whether the conflict continues or ends. If, as many suspect, the Arab states are not really interested either in peace with Israel or in a Palestinian state, this process gets that message in the open.

Above all, this approach helps Israelis and Palestinians to discover the vital interests they share in common: an end to the Arab states' hostility to Israel. In the future, Palestinians would exert pressure on the Arab presidents, kings and emirs to make concessions to Israel -- and what a startling change for the better that would be.

The Israelis have in effect already endorsed this plan. As Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told The Wall Street Journal earlier this week, "Activity of the U.S. hasn't only been concentrated on talks with Palestinians: There has to be effort also with Arab countries. It is now futile to address Israeli or Palestinian aspirations in isolation. All the pieces of the problem have to be wrapped together and dealt with at the same time. The U.S. government

should leave behind the desultory efforts of past years and try something with few
and better chances of success.

Mr. Pipes, the director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, is
of "The Rushdie Affair," (Birch Lane Press, 1990).

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