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Prospects for the Middle East Peace Process

What is the likelihood of its ending successfully?

There seems to be much concern, especially in United States government circles, that the so-called peace process has reached an impasse and that it may be ultimately endangered. The fault for this is generally attributed to the Israelis and especially to the alleged "intransigence" of Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

What are the facts?

Promises unkept—agreements broken. Yasser Arafat made promises and assurances that he obviously never had any intention of fulfilling—the principal, and really the easiest to comply with, being the promise to rescind the infamous covenant of the PLO, which unequivocally calls for the destruction of Israel. Also, the PLO has taken no measures to curb terrorist activity, which was Israel's primary concern and consideration in agreeing to the far-reaching concessions of Oslo. In fact, the

Palestinian Authority (P.A.) continues to shelter well-known members of terrorist groups and, more often than not, to enlist them in their so-called police force. This "police force" is now estimated to be over 50,000 members strong—more than twice the number allowed under the Oslo accord. There is also the never-ending incitement to violence on the part of the Palestinians, the poisoning of the minds of school children, and the steady anti-Israel invective in Palestinian media. Israel is always described as the enemy, never as the peace partner. "With blood and fire we shall liberate Jerusalem" is not a slogan that conveys peaceful intentions and a desire for reconciliation.

The basic flaw in the process. But the basic flaw in the peace process is the fact that the Arab world has not come to terms with the very existence of Israel, the Jewish state. The presence of such a state in the midst of Arabdom is intolerable to the Moslem Arabs, an insult that has to be removed. No "sacrifice for peace" can change that.

This mindset includes all Arabs—their leaders and their respective populations—including, for certain, Egypt and

the Palestinians. The only exception may be King Hussein of Jordan, who, after having participated in three unsuccessful wars against Israel, appears to be truly desirous of peace.

Mr. Netanyahu's alleged "intransigence" is based on his reluctance or unwillingness to give away, without getting anything in return, vital strategic assets to those who are sworn to destroy Israel. And it isn't clear why Israel should yield any territory at all. The whole concept of "land for peace" is a new one in the history of mankind. It had always been clearly understood that, if a country

launched an aggressive war and lost it, a price would have to be paid—usually including the loss of territory. Why should things now be

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reversed and why should Israel, the repeatedly aggressed-against but victorious party, pay a price in territory? And, in any case, if "land for peace" is such a good idea, why, for the sake of such peace, shouldn't the Arabs make some such "sacrifice?"

Our State Department, unfortunately, also seems to have fallen under this spell and keeps exhorting the Israeli government to make ever greater accommodations to the Palestinians in order to bring about peace. This is the more remarkable since it should be clear that the only consideration that keeps Arab aggression against Israel in check is Israel's strength. Once that strength is diminished, war will follow, and not peace. Israel is America's unsinkable aircraft carrier, its most important strategic asset in that part of the world. It would be folly to weaken Israel and to make it a strategic liability for America, instead of an asset.

The Oslo peace process never had a very good chance to work because the gap between the two sides was too wide. What Israel could concede without totally compromising its security was not sufficient for the Palestinians. Arafat, having become the victim of his own rhetoric, has promised his people what Israel has always been unable to give, especially surrendering vital strategic assets, endangering its water supply, admitting hundreds of thousands of so-called refugees, and conceding any part of Jerusalem. Much of this could have been overcome if Arafat, in the more than four years since the handshake, would have shown real evidence of a desire for making peace with Israel and if he would have kept his obligations under the Oslo agreement. But that is not the case. The policy is still to break every promise and to violate every provision, as long as it serves to advance the struggle and to damage and hopefully to destroy Israel. There can be no peace until that mindset totally changes. Unfortunately, Oslo or no Oslo, that does not seem to be in the cards for the immediate future.

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Facts and Logic about the Middle East
P.O. Box 590359 ■ San Francisco, CA 94159

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