History 12

**Issue: Does the US have a role in the Middle East peace process?**

**Decide which of the following viewpoints you tend to support and explain why. If you agree with neither, state the position you do support and explain it. Be sure to use specific information from this reading, your lecture notes, the textbook and other sources to support your position.**

**Background**

The Middle Ease has been a focus of conflict for most of the twentieth century. Throughout the 1990s, the United States intervened to introduce peace in the region, with limited success. In the excerpts that follow, Rabbi Sherwin Wine, founder of the Humanist Institute, and Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi examine the priorities in the region. Rabbi Wine argues that peace must be politically imposed by a superpower such as the United States, whereas Ashrawi argues that the Palestinian government must reform itself – without US interference.

**Rabbi Sherwin Wine, founder of the Humanist Institute**

The failure of **the Oslo peace process** is as much the result of intense hatred and suspicion as it is the incompatibility of vested interests. The issues of boundaries, Jerusalem, and refugees are shrouded by such levels of distrust that the normal compromises that negotiations bring can never change. No arrangements can provide the security that most Israelis want. And no ‘deal’ can yield the sense of honour and vindication that most Palestinians and Arabs seek.

Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians by themselves cannot achieve peace – or even an effective truce – by relying on negotiations alone; the cycle of vengeance has its own logic. Every terrorist action incites retaliation. No antagonist can allow itself to be seen as weak. Revenge is a necessary tactic in maintaining credibility. The cycle cannot stop itself without outside intervention.

A binational Israeli-Palestinian state – a dream of many peaceniks is not politically viable even though it would be economically desirable. **Jewish and Arab nationalism** are realities; they cannot be wished away. Mutual hatred and suspicion are realities; they cannot be dismissed. Arguing against nationalism may not work a hundred years from now but it doesn’t fly today. A Jewish state – in which Jewish national culture is the dominant culture and most people speak Hebrew – is no more racist than would be an Arab state whose dominant culture and language reflected its people. Three million Palestinian refugees cannot return to the Jewish state without destroying the Jewish national character of the Jewish state.

Because outside intervention is required, the only superpower capable of orchestrating it is successfully is the United States. Since September 11 [2001], George W. Bush has mobilized an effective coalition of world powers, including Europe, Russia, China, and India – as well as many allies in the Muslim world. The war between the Israelis and the Palestinians has begun to undermine the coalition, especially with Bush’s perceived support of the **Ariel Sharon** government in Israel. Joint intervention with the approval of the United Nations and with the support of moderate Muslim powers could restore the coalition. This intervention is no different from the intervention that the United States initiated in Bosnia and Kosovo [1995].

What would be the elements of such an intervention? The United States controls the process. The Israelis don’t trust the United Nations and won’t cooperate with an effort managed by the hostile nations of the developing world.

The United States acts as a neutral ‘parent.’ It doesn’t always praise one side and condemn the other; it creates a setting for negotiations, with the presence of major members of the coalition. The format of such negotiations is only a pretense. In the ‘back room’ the United States dictates the settlement and everybody knows that the United States has imposed the settlement. Both antagonists protest, but they yield because they have no choice.

All that can realistically be achieved at this time is an effective truce. Peace will have to await a reduction in the fury of hatred and suspicion. For now, an imposed settlement should include the following:

* the removal of all Jewish settlements from the **West Bank** and **Gaza**, except those settlements which function as contiguous communities for Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.
* the digging of a ditch and construction of a fence between Jews and Arabs along the adjusted **1967 boundaries**
* the policing of this fence by the United States and its European allies
* the granting of **Arab East Jerusalem** to the Palestinians as the national capital
* the demilitarization of the **new Palestinian state**, with periodic inspections by the United States and its coalition partners
* compensation for **Palestinian refugees** who cannot return

Such compensation may cost over $30 billion and would be covered by the United States, Japan and European allies. If the compensation helps to bring about an effective truce, it would be worth the investment. Rescuing the global economy for peace justifies the expense.

Israel needs to be compensated for its ‘willingness’ to shrink and to confront the wrath of its right-wing extremists. Since it won’t in the foreseeable future be accepted by the Arab and Muslim worlds, it needs to be regarded as the European power it is. Israel’s high-tech economy needs the European market, just as its European culture needs a European support system. The price that Europe pays for this necessary peace is that it accepts Israel as a member of the European Union. Such acceptance is no different than acceptance of Cyprus or Turkey, and Israelis will be better off trading in euros than shekels.

After this settlement is imposed, terrorist violence will likely continue. The war against Muslim fundamentalist terrorists will also continue. For the extremists in the Arab and Muslim world – and even in the Jewish world – hatred is a way of life. For moderates, an effective truce will enable them to join the forces of peace.

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**Hanan Ashrawi, member of the Palestinian Legislative Council**

The current push for changes in the Palestinian political process is neither new or externally motivated. Rather, there is a call to implement a homegrown authentic programme of structural, legal and procedural reform which has been gathering steam in Palestinian society for years. Political reform must come from the Palestinians. Foreign interference will not help the process.

Average Palestinians have become increasingly frustrated with the repressive and extra-legal security services, and with the inept administration in the occupied territories. Throughout the deeply flawed Oslo peace process, many elected officials stood beyond the reach of their voting constituencies. These matters came to a head after the latest round of Israeli sieges. With much of Nablus, Bethlehem and Ramallah in ruins, Palestinians began asking: how was this allowed to happen? Where was the protection? Can things be put back together?

The only way to close the gap in confidence between Palestinians and their leaders is to overhaul the political process. A mere reshuffling of the deck will not do. Reform is also needed to strengthen international support and streamline domestic mechanism for confronting the challenges raised by the ongoing occupation.

Making constitutional changes in the middle of a war, or in the wake of the sort of physical destruction recently inflicted by the Israeli military, will not be easy. Though Palestinians will not be broken, the civil infrastructure of the **Palestinian Authority** is in shambles. The World Bank conservatively estimates the damage of recent Israeli incursions throughout the West Bank at $361 million. This is nothing compared to the suffering and loss of life.

New presidential, legislative council and municipal elections are needed immediately and will require the registration of more than a million voters. All mismanagement, abuse of authority and misuse of public funds must be weeded out. The bloated cabinet should be trimmed to become efficient and accountable. Four-year term limits should be imposed on security officials. There must be equality before the law and a clear separation of powers.

The new draft legislation which would bar the president or security forces from interfering with judicial decisions – for example, keeping those who have been ordered freed behind bars – is a step in the right direction. The application of the new legislation would spell the end of the state security courts, notorious for their lack of due process and rapid-fire convictions. It would also require trials for those involved in extra-judicial killings, including the murder of alleged collaborators.

The call for Palestinian political reform belongs to the Palestinian people, and it deserves sharp skepticism when made by others. In the hands of the Israeli government the call for reform is both disingenuous and self-serving. The intention is to appropriate grassroots frustrations in order to undermine the credibility of larger Palestinian political demands.

The Israeli government also hopes to divert international criticism and increase Palestinian factionalism in order to delay military withdrawal from the occupied territories. Coming so soon after the war crimes committed in Jenin and other Palestinian towns and camps, **Ariel Sharon** is the last person to be advising others on democratic transition. More importantly, however, Sharon has latched on to ‘reform’ as a precondition for negotiations in order to avoid anything that would foil his unilateral expansion plans.

Coming from the American government, the call for reform is generally counterproductive. American involvement has been far from principled or even-handed, and the Palestinian trust of US influence is at an all-time low. Historically, the US administration has been more willing to turn a blind eye to abuses within the Palestinian system so long as the Palestinian Authority discharged its ‘security’ obligations towards Israel and maintained its commitment to the ‘process.’

Civil society organizations and average citizens have presented the Palestinian government with an invaluable opportunity to correct deep-seated problems. To succeed, the movement for fundamental change must be proactive and steered internally by and for the benefit of Palestinians. Otherwise, it will end up being reactive and forced externally for the benefit of others. Such neo-colonial interference can only backfire.

Source: ‘Reforming from Within,’ by Hanan Ashrawi, *The Guardian* (London), 7 June 2002.