
A Strategy for Israel

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YOSSI BEILIN, Israel's impresario of the 1993 Oslo accords with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), appreciates the political power of an accomplished fact. While serving in the Labor-led governments of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, Beilin strove to ensure that the Oslo process would establish many such facts: new agreements with PLO leaders, new Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and high public expectations of "peace now." These, he explained in articles and speeches, would constrain future Israeli leaders, even (or especially) those who disapproved of Labor's peace policies. And so they have.

Benjamin Netanyahu, a fierce critic of Oslo, formed Israel's current Likud-led government over a year ago. The ensuing months have seen substantial Palestinian rioting (in Hebron this past July and throughout the West Bank last September), terrorism (most notably, the suicide bombings in a Tel Aviv café and in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market), and the unapologetic exploitation of such violence by the Palestinian Authority (PA) for diplomatic purposes.

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Yet Netanyahu has not dismantled the Oslo process. Nor has he succeeded in remedying what he had earlier diagnosed as its chief flaw: the PA's systematic refusal to comply with the accords. Although he appears not to believe that the process can succeed—that is, produce a mutually satisfactory agreement—neither will he declare that it has failed. From his first day as Prime Minister, he has found himself working within a web of others' weaving.

II

CHAMPIONS OF Oslo like to say that Netanyahu sticks with the process because he must. Since Rabin's famous handshake with Yasir Arafat on the White House lawn in September 1993, they have promoted the twin notions that Oslo was inevitable and that in any case Israel has "no alternative." When Israel embraced the PLO as its "peace partner," Rabin even asserted that this was but the natural culmination of Labor's longstanding policy in favor of trading "land for peace."

But it was not. Labor's traditional land-for-peace policy arose out of an Israeli national-security consensus that opposed any new, independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and rejected Israeli recognition of the PLO. The policy's essence was that a satisfactory peace settlement should be reached with an authoritative and credible Arab interlocutor *before* Israel relinquished any territory. Labor had never suggested withdrawal

before peace, much less withdrawal without peace. Nor had it ever proposed withdrawal as a means of fostering Palestinian (let alone PLO) moderation in order to increase the chances of peace at some future date.

Indeed, Yitzhak Rabin led Labor to victory in the June 1992 elections on a platform that emphasized no recognition of the PLO and no new Palestinian state. His affirmative promise was a genuine land-for-peace agreement with the Palestinians within six months. Once in office, the Rabin government spent over a year in fruitless negotiations on such an agreement. But then, in the summer of 1993, with the talks stuck in a humiliating deadlock, Rabin decided that his only way out was to embrace the PLO as a partner and initiate Israeli territorial withdrawals even before the conclusion of a peace agreement. Hence Oslo.

To be more precise, Oslo represented the confluence of two streams of thought. The first, that of Rabin, concentrated on the practical benefit of quitting the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Rabin considered Israeli rule over the Arabs in these territories a burden that Israel could not carry indefinitely. As he later told the Knesset, the choice was between, on the one hand, retaining the territories and thus transforming Israel into "a binational state," and, on the other, maintaining an Israel "with less territory, but which would be a Jewish state." By means of Oslo, he declared, "We chose to be a Jewish state."

The fountainhead of the other stream of thought was Shimon Peres, Rabin's Foreign Minister. Peres believed that the end of the cold war, the information-technology revolution, and other happy circumstances had produced a "New Middle East" in which ambitions for material prosperity had taken precedence in Arab minds over the venerable aspiration to destroy Israel. He posited that the Palestinian community in general no longer burned with a high degree of religious or nationalistic fervor. What it desired was just a slice of Palestine to call its own and, with international aid and investment, opportunities for economic betterment.

Both analyses favored Israeli territorial withdrawal, although they diverged widely in their respective concepts of "peace." Rabin's unsentimental notion was "separation"—literally building fences and walls and, to the extent possible, keeping the Palestinians on one side and the Israelis on the other. To Peres, by contrast, peace meant tearing down walls between Arabs and Jews as old-fashioned ideas of sovereignty yielded to the free movement of people, ideas, and goods.

Events in the years following the handshake—especially numerous terrorist attacks that killed and maimed Israelis in record numbers—did not conform to Peres's vision. Even Israelis originally enamored of Oslo complained that the "peace process" had proved a political disappointment and a security nightmare. And Israeli Jews were stunned by the regular spectacle of thousands of Palestinians rejoicing in the streets over the carnage wrought by Arab suicide bombers. Advocating separation was Rabin's way of assuring the country that, even if the Oslo process failed to produce peace, it would at least succeed in "divorcing" Israel from two million Palestinians. Separation was needed not to make peace possible, but to make possible an Israeli withdrawal from the territories.

ALTHOUGH RABIN and Peres differed in their conception of peace, both knew that requiring the Palestinian Authority to fulfill its promises under Oslo could kill the accords, and both therefore resolved that Israeli withdrawals and transfers of authority should not hinge on Palestinian compliance. (Characteristically, the Peres school held out the hope that additional Israeli concessions would, over time, engender greater moderation on the Arab side, while the Rabin school was simply unwilling to postpone Israeli withdrawals until the Palestinians got properly organized, which might not happen for years, if ever.) But neither Peres nor Rabin would admit publicly to being resigned to Palestinian violations. Although the government's actual policy was to proceed, if necessary, with unilateral withdrawal, politically it was essential to depict Oslo as a two-sided peace agreement—a land-for-peace bargain which Israel was expecting the Arab side to honor.

This contradiction necessitated prodigies of double-talk. Here, for example, is Peres, in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post* (August 18, 1995, bracketed material in the original):

Q: You have suggested that when [Yasir] Arafat spoke of *jihad* or holy war in a recent videotaped appearance, he was merely being rhetorical. Yet Arafat's critics charge that this reveals his true intentions. What is the basis for your viewpoint? Why are the critics wrong?

A: Yes [it is rhetoric], partly said to justify the past. [At the same time] what counts is not the intentions of the Palestinians. What counts is the confrontation between two realities.

Q: Are you saying that it is irrelevant if

Arafat genuinely wants peace or just wants to obtain as much as he can?

A: Yes, I do believe it is irrelevant.

Q: This is a big statement.

A: [This is the] Israeli reality, the Israeli strength. We don't only rely upon [Arafat's] intentions. . . . They have changed already. They go for democracy. They go for dialogue. . . .

And Rabin, in an interview published a month later:

Q: Is this agreement irreversible?

A: As I see it, we have passed the point of no return. There is a limit to predicting the future. This is why we have to keep strong military forces, a strong intelligence community, and strong police.

Q: But when you refer to the point of no return, are you saying that Israel will not go back to the places from which it will be pulling out?

A: I did not say so.

Q: So what does "the point of no return" mean?

A: It means that we are on the road to peace.

Whatever effect such pronouncements had in Israel, they did not impress Arafat. He grasped early on that the Israeli government valued Palestinian promises more in the making than in the keeping. Not only could he flout his obligations with impunity, but he could sell Israel the same unfulfilled promises over and over again for new consideration. And so he did, both regarding the promise to delete from the Palestinian National Covenant those provisions calling for Israel's destruction and regarding the promise to suppress anti-Israel terrorism.

III

IN THE period between the signing of the first Oslo accords and Israel's 1996 elections, Likud made political hay out of the compliance issue. As Benjamin Netanyahu, then Likud's chairman, asserted: "There is no red line which this [Labor] government has not crossed. No sooner does it draw a red line than it erases it."

But Likud's case against Oslo went deeper than tactical criticism. Likud leaders had condemned the accords from the beginning, before Arafat had the chance to violate them. For them, Oslo's first major flaw was that Arafat—and the Palestinian leadership in general—lacked credibility and authority. A stable peace was possible, they maintained, only if the Palestinians first evolved re-

sponsible administrative institutions and a leadership that enjoyed legitimacy in the eyes of its own people, refrained from murdering its political opponents, operated within and not above the law, and practiced moderation and compromise at home and abroad.

Oslo's second flaw in Likud's eyes was that a PLO-led mini-state in the territories, which Oslo was designed to create, would promote terrorism and instability rather than security and conciliation. Accordingly, Likud leaders criticized the view that, even if real peace remained unattainable, Israel should end the occupation anyway. They argued that the Labor chorus of we-can't-go-on, there-is-no-alternative-to-peace reflected demoralization on the Left and damaged the morale of the whole country.

During 1995, the Israeli public grew increasingly receptive to Likud's arguments, and Rabin fell behind Netanyahu in the opinion polls. But in November Rabin was assassinated, causing a swell of sympathy and nostalgia for the murdered leader and his policies. It became a delicate matter for the opposition to criticize Oslo without outraging affectionate memories. From that point on, Netanyahu spoke less about Oslo's flawed conception and more about the Labor government's practice of making concessions without "reciprocity"—that is, without insisting on PA compliance—and its susceptibility to intimidation by the PA. "Arafat has gotten into the habit of fomenting a crisis and then summoning Peres to make demands," Netanyahu charged. In a Likud government, he promised, "This will stop."

Asked in September 1995 if he would honor Oslo if he came to power, Netanyahu said: "We will decide at that time. So far the PLO hasn't honored the agreement, so Israel is not legally bound to honor it." As the campaign for the May 1996 elections developed, Netanyahu clarified his position: he would not automatically discard Oslo if he won, but he would demand that the PA fulfill its commitments.

IV

AFTER DEFEATING Shimon Peres and winning the 1996 elections, Netanyahu gave short shrift to his own idea that the PA's systematic violation of the accords already entitled Israel to abrogate them. Announcing that he would proceed with peace diplomacy on the basis of Oslo, Netanyahu promised to exert himself in good faith to make the process work. Within hours after the

election, he dispatched a representative to make personal contact with the PA.

In briefings to foreign-policy groups in the weeks following the election, Netanyahu's top advisers stressed a paradoxical line: while the Prime Minister still disapproved of Oslo, he was better positioned than Rabin or Peres to bring the process to a successful conclusion. This was so, above all, because Netanyahu could threaten credibly to stop negotiations if the PA's violations went unremedied. And he could do *that* because, unlike his predecessors, the new Prime Minister did not believe that unilateral withdrawal was better than the status quo. Finally, whereas Labor's political fortunes had been tied to Oslo, Likud was free to put Oslo to an honest test.

The key to repairing Oslo, Netanyahu's team recognized, lay in making the Arab side believe that Israel would walk away—terminate the process—if the PA did not improve its compliance record. The government's chief task, therefore, was to persuade Arabs, Israelis, and the world at large that Israel had a constructive alternative to Oslo and the will, if necessary, to choose it. This was no easy job, given the intrepidity of Oslo's supporters over the years in promoting the notion that Israel had no option but the "peace process."

From the start, the new government stressed a well-established Likud theme: that peace and democracy were linked. This theme was both positive and readily comprehensible—and it attacked Oslo at its heart. Warning that Arab history does not necessarily conform to the schedule of impatient Israeli doves, it highlighted the crucial issues of what Palestinian leaders actually think—their philosophy and intentions—and how their political institutions actually operate—whether by law or by the gun. By emphasizing these issues, the government intended to shift the focus of debate from the loaded question, "Should Israel make peace with the Palestinians?" to "Is peace with the Palestinians possible under current circumstances?"

Netanyahu gave prominence to the peace-and-democracy theme in addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress a few weeks after his election:

Unless we want more Saddams to rise, we must apply the standards of democracy and human rights in the Middle East. . . . I don't think we should accept the idea that the Middle East is the . . . last isolated sanctuary that will be democracy-free for all time except for the presence of Israel.

I realize this is a process. It may be a long-term process. . . . [But] it is time for states of the Middle East to put the issues of human rights and democratization on their agenda. Democratization means accepting a free press and the right of a legal opposition to organize and express itself. . . . [It means being] able to disagree, to express our disagreement. . . . It means tolerance. And it means an inherent shift away from aggression. . . .

As time went on, however, and the new Israeli government came under increasing criticism for not moving quickly enough toward peace, Netanyahu began to downplay democracy. To the American Congress in July, he had identified the three pillars of peace as security, reciprocity, and democracy. To the Israeli Knesset in October, he announced: "We stand on two basic principles: security and reciprocity in respecting agreements." Today, almost a year later, the goal of cultivating Palestinian democratic institutions is neither a centerpiece of Netanyahu's political discourse nor an operative element of his policies.

V

THE STRATEGY the Netanyahu government outlined upon first assuming office has, then, been abandoned; but no other strategy has taken its place. Rather, the government appears continually to get caught up in events and diverted from whatever plan it may have. Many incidents have combined to create this impression, the cumulative effect of which has been to damage Netanyahu's reputation for resoluteness. A few examples will suffice:

- Netanyahu initially said he would "consider" meeting Arafat only if national security were at stake. In the first months after the May 1996 elections, no meeting occurred. Arafat then appealed to Israeli President Ezer Weizman, who, at the end of August, let it be known that he would organize a meeting in his own home with the PA chairman unless Netanyahu agreed to a face-to-face get-together within ten days. Netanyahu promptly acceded, and the two men met on September 4. While Likud members of the Knesset noted disapprovingly that Arafat had not fulfilled the conditions which Netanyahu had previously set for their meeting, Shimon Peres predicted on Israel Radio that if the pressure were intense enough, the new Prime Minister would agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state as he did to the meeting with Arafat.

- Three weeks after this same meeting, Arafat seized an opportunity to publicize his displeasure with Israeli policy. The Netanyahu government had opened a new exit from a Hasmonean-era tunnel in the vicinity of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Denouncing this act as “a big crime against our religion and our holy places,” Arafat set in train several days of large-scale rioting in which PA policemen used their automatic weapons to kill Israelis. In an effort to help end the crisis, President Clinton asked Netanyahu and Arafat to convene at the White House.

Before leaving for Washington, Netanyahu declared that the rioting “was no spontaneous combustion but rather a deliberate decision” by Arafat, and he specified that the PA had perpetrated the killings with guns provided by Israel itself pursuant to Oslo. En route to the meeting, he added: “[I]f the [PA] violations continue time and time again, clearly the conclusion will be that the [Oslo] process cannot continue on this basis.” But he *also* said, and for the first time, that Israel was willing to “accelerate” the pace of negotiations and to hold “continuous talks” on a withdrawal of Israeli forces from Hebron and other issues until an agreement was reached.

At the White House, although he resisted pressure to make additional concessions to Arafat, Netanyahu made a show of warmly clasping the PLO leader’s hand, called him “my partner and my friend,” and asserted that personal meetings of this kind improved communication and “facilitate[d] trust.”

- In an episode this past spring that got relatively little play in the press, the Netanyahu government withdrew its request to the United States to extradite Mousa Abu Marzook, a top Hamas official who was wanted in Israel on charges relating to bombings and other terrorist attacks that had killed 47 people and wounded 148. As the *New York Times* reported at the time, Israel’s decision was based explicitly on “fears of terrorist reprisals.” It was also, according to the *Times*, “something of an embarrassment,” for the Palestinians were “certain to note that Netanyahu was effectively releasing a Hamas leader on the basis of political considerations while . . . hammering Yasir Arafat for releasing Palestinian militants charged in terrorist activities.” Sharpening the point, the *Times* added that Netanyahu “had come to office with the reputation of a hard-liner on the issue of jailed terrorists [and] had argued in books he wrote that they should not be set free.”

- Among the principal PA violations of which

Likud leaders complained both before and after the 1996 elections were: the PA’s failure to confiscate illegal arms in the hands of terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad; the recruitment of terrorists into the PA security forces; the PA’s refusal to hand over terrorism suspects to Israel for prosecution; the rapid release of terrorists from PA prisons; the conduct of official PA operations in Jerusalem; the use of incendiary anti-Israel rhetoric by Arafat and other PA officials (including continual calls for *jihad* and praise of suicide bombers as “heroes and martyrs”); and the PA’s failure to amend the Palestinian National Covenant.

NONE OF these violations of Oslo had been remedied by January 1997, and yet in that month Israel concluded an agreement with the PA for a redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron. In his statement to the Knesset, Netanyahu explained that his government had “inherited a difficult reality” and “difficult agreements” that were “full of breaches”—but that from now on it would insist on several “fundamental principles.” The first of these was “reciprocity,” which “[w]e established—in an official document—as a basic principle for the continuation of the process of the permanent-status negotiations.” That official document was a “Note for the Record” drafted by the American diplomat Dennis Ross and listing unresolved compliance issues. It was, the Prime Minister announced, “the anchoring and formalization of the principle of reciprocity, for the first time since the Oslo agreements.”

In other words, the Netanyahu government, intent on demonstrating its willingness to carry Oslo forward in good faith, had chosen not to make PA compliance with earlier Oslo accords a condition for the Hebron agreement or for the redeployment itself. But now that the Hebron deal was done, complete with a U.S.-certified pledge by both sides that the specified open compliance issues would “be dealt with immediately and in parallel,” Israel would make rectification of PA violations the *sine qua non* for further movement under Oslo.

A half-year and more has passed since the Hebron agreement. The PA still has remedied none of its violations—Hamas has not been disarmed, none of the requested terror suspects has been turned over to Israel, the Palestinian National Covenant remains unamended, and so on down the list. But Israel has agreed anyway to negotiate “final status.” The fact that these talks have been delayed until now is due not to Israel’s having made “reciprocity” a condition for holding them but to Arafat’s

having suspended Palestinian participation as a protest against Israeli construction of apartment buildings at Har Homa in Jerusalem. (With characteristic brazenness, the PA condemned that construction as an Israeli violation of Oslo.)

VI

THE UPSHOT of all this is that the Netanyahu government has not communicated to friend or foe a clear message as to what it wants to accomplish in its negotiations with the PA, what Israel's minimum requirements are, or what would be the consequences if those requirements remained unsatisfied. The government has neither prepared the public to accept the possibility of an Israeli abrogation of Oslo nor succeeded in getting the Palestinians to take seriously its demands that they start fulfilling their commitments. Meanwhile, events of the last few months—from the murder of Palestinian land dealers by PA forces, to the PA's imprisonment of Palestinian human-rights advocates, to Arab riots in Hebron, to the July suicide bombing in Jerusalem—offer little grounds for Israelis or Arabs to be optimistic either about peace or about greater physical security.

What, then, is to be done about the Oslo accords, the negotiating process, the PA, and the territories? A number of options suggest themselves, of which the first would be to see the Oslo process through to completion.

Is that possible? Although Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres were coy about the matter, it is understood by all concerned that Oslo's destination, from the beginning, has been Palestinian statehood. Netanyahu declares often and emphatically that he will never agree to a sovereign Palestinian state, though he is amenable to a self-governing Palestinian entity subject to constraints to protect Israel's security and other interests. David Bar-Illan, a high-level adviser in the Prime Minister's office, explains:

[Y]ou can call it anything you want. You can call it autonomy-plus or a state-minus. What Netanyahu is talking about is limited sovereignty. . . . It cannot have . . . an army of a quarter of a million people; cannot produce its own nonconventional [or] conventional weapons; cannot make alliances with radical regimes like Iraq and Iran; cannot control the airspace over Israel, etc.

Nor, Bar-Illan added on another occasion, can it be a regime "that will import millions of people who

call themselves refugees and park them on our doorstep."

If the Israeli government maintains its opposition to a new, sovereign Palestinian state, either the Oslo "final-status" negotiations will deadlock beyond redemption (as they may do anyway over a number of other issues, like Jerusalem) or the PA will decide to accept, for the time being, whatever diminished form of statehood Israel is willing to offer. Many in Israel and abroad would judge the former outcome a diplomatic disaster for which the Netanyahu government should be held responsible. But from the perspective of Netanyahu and his supporters, the latter outcome could be even worse.

The reason is this: any "final-status" arrangement that provided for a new Palestinian state, even one with limited sovereignty, would inevitably lack finality. The state would cover less than the whole of the territories (which are anyway less than 25 percent of the "sacred Arab land" between the Jordan River and the sea). It would not include all of eastern Jerusalem (and might not include any of it). And its sovereignty would be severely limited in various ways. (All this would be true, it bears noting, even if Labor had done the negotiating, at least if Rabin's and Peres's frequent statements on the matter are to be credited.)

The premise of Oslo's "final-status" provisions is that Israel will offer at least minimum satisfaction of Palestinian national aspirations. Oslo can produce a stable peace, therefore, only if Palestinian nationalism turns out to be a small-beer phenomenon. If, on the other hand, that cause is as robust and ambitious as it appears to be, the Palestinians will not be assuaged by the kind of hemmed-in, hands-tied, semi-independent entity envisioned by the Labor-party architects of Oslo, much less the one envisioned by the current Likud-led government.

When PA leaders speak within their own community, they do not lecture their people, as they do the Israelis, on the virtues of trading land for peace. On the contrary, the PA makes a point of embellishing its stationery, public monuments, TV broadcasts, and schoolbooks with maps that designate Palestine as covering not only the West Bank and Gaza Strip but all of Israel. Arafat's domestic speeches reinforce the point by declaring that Oslo implements the 1974 Palestine National Council resolution which approved negotiations as a means of dismantling Israel in stages. Unless Palestinian leaders drastically change their own and their community's thinking, a mini-state can be expected to

serve as a base from which the “final status” will be challenged at the first opportunity.

As for limitations on sovereignty—including demilitarization, restrictions on military relationships with other states, and limits on the so-called Palestinian “right of return”—the PA may promise to respect these as the price of Israeli recognition; but once a new state comes formally into being, how long before it defies them? Like arms-control treaties, peace agreements between democratic and non-democratic parties are often deemed of great significance until they are signed and ratified, whereupon demands that the undemocratic party adhere to their terms are commonly dismissed as legalistic and impractical.

The same means now used by the Palestinians to pressure Israel—terrorism, rioting, Arab economic sanctions, diplomatic condemnation—will also be available post-“final status.” So will the means now used by Israel’s neighboring states, including threats of renewed war. What will have changed—and it is an important change—is that Israeli forces will no longer be able to act directly against security threats originating from the territory of the new state without violating the internationally recognized sovereignty of an independent country.

To be sure, if one assumes that a mini-state of their own *will* satisfy the Palestinians’ national ambitions and neutralize their anti-Zionism, then security concerns are beside the point: Israel need not defend itself against neighbors who actually are at peace with it. But so long as Palestinian politics remains dominated by a hostile, violent, and lawless leadership, Israel cannot assume that “peace” will serve as the basis for its security. Even without the machinery of a state, Oslo has enhanced the Palestinians’ capability to exploit anti-Israel violence for political ends. A state would give them a much greater capacity than they now have to facilitate terrorism against Israel, conduct anti-Israel diplomacy, assist or join enemy armed forces in the event of war, and destabilize local states (such as Jordan) that cooperate with Israel.

In short, if consummated in the form of a new Palestinian state, Oslo over time is more likely to result in war than in peace.

VII

THE NETANYAHU government has a long and intimate acquaintance with these arguments; indeed, it based its campaign for office on them. That is why, for Netanyahu and his team, the op-

tion of completing Oslo must lack appeal. But this has not moved the government to discard Oslo. Although it frequently repeats its demands for reciprocity, those demands remain unmet, and the process lurches forward in any event. For various reasons, no doubt including a well-grounded fear of massive upheaval in the territories, and the prospect of confrontation with 50,000 or so PA policemen with automatic weapons, even this new Israeli government has declined to put Oslo to a make-or-break test.

And so we come to another option: a “final status” which would not be arrived at through the Oslo process but would, in effect, be imposed by Israel. This might be thought of as unilateral withdrawal accompanied by tough talk. The Netanyahu government floated such an option in mid-June of this year when, with the Oslo process stalemated, the Prime Minister’s office undertook a new diplomatic initiative known as the “Allon-plus” plan. As presented to the cabinet and to journalists, the plan delineated a “final-status” map identifying additional land the Prime Minister was willing to transfer to PA control.

“Allon-plus” was a puzzling move. The government anticipated all along that talks would eventually resume—in August, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright announced a renewed American effort toward that end. Netanyahu may have thought that the “Allon-plus” plan, by showing a willingness to relinquish even more territory to the PA, would make Israel appear forthcoming in the Oslo process and therefore protect it from criticism if the talks should again fail. But there are no signs that “Allon-plus” could win the PA’s acceptance, or even come close. Not even the original Allon peace plan of the early 1970’s ever received a serious nibble from any Arab leader. As Netanyahu’s plan is even less favorable to the Arab side than was the original, it cannot be expected to shield the government from blame in the event of the Oslo talks’ failure.

Dore Gold, a top adviser to the Prime Minister who was recently appointed Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, has offered another reason for floating the plan: it was intended to lower unrealistic Palestinian expectations of “a Palestinian state on all of the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital.” According to Gold, “One of the things this plan does is to shift the psychology of expectations.” But it is an open question whether publishing the Allon-plus map has tended to deflate or inflate such expectations. Identifying more land for future relinquishment is tantamount

to having given up that land already; the other side can be expected to demand that negotiations now begin from the new baseline. And if the Netanyahu government, never having translated its Allon-plus plan into a reality on the ground, were to be succeeded in time by a Labor government, the latter's starting point for territorial concessions would inevitably be the previous government's map.

The Oslo accords were meant to give Rabin's policy at least the appearance of a bilateral peace. A unilateral withdrawal along the lines of the Allon-plus plan would preserve all the disadvantages of completing Oslo and offer none of its diplomatic rewards.

VIII

FINALLY THERE is the option of stalling, of paying lip-service to Oslo without actually moving toward a "final-status" agreement. This at times has seemed to be the Netanyahu government's real policy.

Stalling entails taking advantage of opportunities not to have to negotiate. For example, when Arafat suspends talks, as he did over the apartment construction at Har Homa, Israel waits patiently. When Arafat finally moves to restart discussions, as he did by sending his negotiators to meet with Israelis in Cairo, Netanyahu can truthfully claim to have paid nothing.

But stalling is not a winning strategy. The appearance of stalling damages the government's credibility at home and abroad. If it claims to be committed to Oslo but fails for weeks and months at a time to move the process along, Israel looks disingenuous. This makes it harder to marshal support when support is needed: in the Har Homa episode, for example, the government was accused by the Israeli Left of making its decisions not on the merits of the case but for the purpose of sabotaging Oslo.

Stalling also has the drawback of not leading anywhere. However one evaluates Yitzhak Rabin's policies, it cannot be denied that he moved Israel decisively onto a new course. There was no possibility that Rabin's successors could simply restore Israel to its position before the handshake. But if it relies on stalling, the Netanyahu government will come to an end without having moved Israel off the Oslo course. And since the appearance of indecision does not please the public, a stalling policy may bring the government to an end sooner rather than later.

Netanyahu campaigned in 1996 by promising peace with security. Stalling means he will not de-

liver on "peace." And Arafat can see to it at any time—including, as a reminder, just before the next Israeli elections—that Netanyahu will be unable to boast that he delivered on security, either. Stalling, in other words, preserves the possibility that Labor will one day return more or less to the diplomatic situation that existed before Netanyahu came to power. It could then close an Oslo "final-status" deal that he is now unwilling to accept. At that point, Netanyahu's government may be seen as having done nothing but delay the inevitable.

IX

THERE IS justice in Netanyahu's complaint that his predecessors dealt him a dreadful hand. The Oslo process points toward unending Palestinian demands backed by threats of violence and an enhanced ability to execute them. Defiantly and systematically, the PA continues to violate the accords and to rely on rioting and terror as the motive force of its diplomacy.

As bad as this situation was for Rabin and Peres, they could find consolation in the fact that they wanted the withdrawal process to proceed, regardless. Netanyahu, in contrast, has said for years that he opposes one-sided "peace" diplomacy. But his betwixt-and-between policy of neither completing nor discarding Oslo, while failing to stand his ground in demanding an end to PA violations, has not won diplomatic sympathy for Israel around the world, including in Washington; has not satisfied any significant segment of the Israeli political spectrum; and has not prevented anti-Israel terrorism or substantial upheaval in the territories.

It is questionable how much longer Israel can live with a "peace process" in which PA officials continually assert that, if Israel is unreasonable, violence is inevitable and in which PA violations themselves remain unremedied. Those violations are likely to grow still graver the more Israel refrains from demanding compliance, and continues to show that it can be intimidated by threats of violence. The more concessions Israel makes—especially as to the arming, training, and operations of PA security forces—the greater will be the PA's capabilities to carry out armed attacks.

Is there a way out? Only if the Israeli government were willing to declare that the PA has failed to meet the Oslo accords' make-or-break test. A year ago, Israeli officials were saying that a real peace process must be two-sided, and free of violent threats. They could do worse than remind themselves of this, and take steps accordingly to

develop a credible strategy to repudiate Oslo in light of the PA's irredeemable malfeasance.

This is not a task to be undertaken lightly, or overnight. Repudiating Oslo would compel Israel, first and foremost, to undo the grossest of the errors inherent in the accords: the arming of scores of thousands of PA "policemen." Rabin's theory was that once Arafat had an amply equipped security force, he could be relied on to crack down on Palestinian "extremists" more brutally and effectively than Israel could do. In fact, Arafat has proved himself far more willing to violate Oslo by confronting Israel than to fulfill his Oslo obligations by confronting Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The PA's security force has succeeded primarily in aggravating Israel's terrorism problem.

Of all the accomplished facts engineered by Netanyahu's predecessors, none is more constraining than the PA's armed forces. If Israel should respond to PA violations of Oslo by abrogating the accords, it would have to disarm those forces before it could disarm the groups that recruit, indoctrinate, train, supply, and dispatch suicide bombers and other terrorists from areas that Israel has turned over to PA administration. (PA forces have themselves been directly implicated in some of the recent terrorist attacks.) Any strategy for repudiating Oslo must therefore take into account the price in blood Israel would have to pay to reestablish an effective security and intelligence policy in the areas now under PA control. That price would be high. It would not likely be so high, however, as the military and diplomatic price Israel would have to pay if it were compelled to take action against terrorists based in a new Palestinian state.

On the battlefield of ideas, repudiating Oslo would necessitate a sustained effort to refute simplis-

tic thinking. The government would have to deflate expectations of imminent peace; preach sobriety and defense; and focus public debate both in Israel and abroad on what must happen on the Arab side before a lasting peace agreement becomes achievable.

But repudiating Oslo need not mean ending diplomacy, or abandoning efforts to bring about the conditions necessary for peace. As it went about explaining to its own citizens why they should not overvalue peace parleys with gangsterish officials of an incipient police state, the Israeli government could also encourage the beneficial evolution of Palestinian politics. To be sure, Israel's influence here is limited; if democratic practices are to take root in the Palestinian community, Palestinians themselves will have to see to it. But if Israel cannot pull democracy out of a hat for the Palestinians, it could at least maintain faith with the many moderate, decent, democratically-inclined Palestinians whose misfortune (thanks to Oslo) is to have been consigned to PLO rule. Israel could also foster economic prosperity and an appreciation of the rule of law, and promote conciliation and greater sympathy among populations. One way it could work toward this end, as Netanyahu suggested in his July 1996 speech to the U.S. Congress, would be by putting "the issues of human rights and democratization on [the] agenda."

Unrealistic expectations about peace work like a euphoria-inducing drug. What both Israel and the Palestinians could use now is the salutary, if rigorous, therapy of detoxification. The process would hardly be easy or pleasant, but it is the only way out of Oslo's web. Much rides on the ability of Israelis to revive those qualities of steadiness and determination that sustained them for decades when the Jewish state did not expect "peace now."