



The Summit Council for World Peace

The Middle East in the 1990s and World Peace

Proceedings of a Summit Council Roundtable

May 23-24, 1993
Washington, D.C.

Statement of Purpose

The Summit Council for World Peace is a private, independent, goodwill organization interested in the promotion of friendly relations among the peoples of the world. It studies and seeks solutions to the problems that affect those relations.

The Council provides a meeting place and forum for world leaders where their wisdom and experience can be utilized and their initiatives can be discussed and implemented in the service of world peace and the betterment of mankind.

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Introduction

Hon. Robert G. Neumann

Roundtable Chairman

The task of planning and organizing a conference on the old and complex problems of Middle East peace is a daunting one indeed. Yet, a perusal of these proceedings surely demonstrates that time has not stood still. Some of the rigid positions taken in the past by these parties to the conflict have been softened by time, by the increase of realism which past disappointments have produced, by the growing acknowledgment that, this time, perhaps, peace might just be possible.

At the same time, it is equally clear that not all differences and certainly not all mutual suspicions have been overcome and that the future peace agreement, if and when it emerges, will not please all parties. If that means that the eventual peace will be so bad that all sides may find it only barely possible to live with it, this is also a very real possibility.

But even that is better than no peace. As one of the speakers at the conference remarked, even the "cold peace" between Egypt and Israel is appreciated in both countries as vastly preferable to war. The very fact that both sides have learned to live with such a "cold" peace constitutes progress. Other parts of the enclosed proceedings show considerable progress over other conference reports of the past. Hence, the Summit Council is pleased to have made this contribution toward peace which is capable of giving new, though cautious, hope to the people of that turbulent region.

Diplomacy is usually a slow process. Progress is often barely visible; breakthroughs are rare, demanded more by the media than by reality.

All this is well illustrated in these proceedings, for which the rapporteur, Dr. Michael J. Mazarr, deserves very great credit.

Ambassador Neumann is Senior Adviser and Director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He is a former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia.

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Roundtable Chairman:

Hon. Robert G. Neumann

Senior Advisor and Director, Middle East Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia

Rapporteur:

Dr. Michael J. Mazarr

Former Senior Fellow

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

One Government invitee from the U.S. Department of State addressed the Roundtable. The views he expressed were his own.

Private Sector Participants:

Hon. Rodrigo Carazo Odio

Chairman, Board of Presidents, Summit Council for World Peace; former President, Republic of Costa Rica (1978-1982)

Mr. Antonio Betancourt

Executive Director

Summit Council for World Peace

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Sultan Qaboos Scholar in Residence, Middle East Institute

H.E. Adnan Abu Odeh

Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United Nations

Dr. Sadiq Al-Azm

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Elliott School of International Affairs
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Mr. Anees Barghouti
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Ms. Jerri Bird
President, Partners for Peace

Dr. Leila F. Dane
Executive Director, Joint Program for Conflict Resolution

Mr. Larry Ekin
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Dr. Osama El-Baz
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H.E. Ahmed Maher el Sayed
Ambassador to the United States of the Arab Republic of Egypt

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Hebrew University

Dr. Edmund Ghareeb
Adjunct Professor, The American University

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Director, The Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University
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Director, Center for the Study of the Global South, School of International Service, The
American University; and
former Ambassador, League of Arab States to the United States and the United Nations

Mr. Jim Matlack
Director, Washington Office
American Friends Service Committee

Mr. Hisham Melhem
Correspondent, As-Safir newspaper, Lebanon

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Director, Washington Office
United Palestinian Appeal

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Mr. Abdellatif Rayan
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Mr. Arthur S. Rublin
Special Assistant for the Peace Process
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Israeli Visiting Professor, Department of Political Science, The Johns Hopkins University

Dr. Abdallah Sbeih
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Hon. Talcott Seelye
Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria

Mr. George Shadrui
Director of Communications
Arab-American Institute

Mr. Michael J. Stopford
Director, United Nations Information Centre

Dr. William J. Taylor, Jr.
Senior Vice President
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Mr. Merle Thorpe, Jr.
President, Foundation for Middle East Peace

Welcoming Remarks

*H.E. Rodrigo Carazo Odio
Chairman, Board of Presidents,
Summit Council for World Peace*

It is my special pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the Board of Presidents of the Summit Council for World Peace, to this distinguished roundtable on "The Middle East in the 1990s and World Peace."

The accomplishment of peace has been my lifelong goal. The commitment to help resolve international conflict and create the political foundation for peace led me to promote the idea of the University for Peace, which the United Nations General Assembly chartered in 1980. I later became President of the University for Peace after serving as President of the Republic of Costa Rica. It is my earnest desire to further the quest for international peace that has brought me into association with the Summit Council for World Peace, where I chair its Board of Presidents.

Please allow me to briefly share a few thoughts.

My belief is that true peace emerges not when one party defeats another. It comes about only when two opposing factions go beyond their differences to come to important agreements. I envision that in the Twenty-first century, peace and a new world order will not be the result of the capitulation of one side to the other, not the victory of one over the other, but will arise through the commonality of values, purpose and understanding of the present cultural spheres working together.

We are witnessing a new Twenty-first century, a real civilization that will be rooted in the vital and ethical power of spiritual behavior and in the ideals of democracy. There is a trend and movement arising that will promote peace and mutual coexistence of groups in this new concept of civilization. I see a common worldview emerging that allows men to work toward a tolerant unity of global values, permitting peaceful dialogue and embracing the ultimate value of concern for humanity.

Peaceful dialogue between the great religions and nations will lead toward greater harmony. We can agree to disagree, working together toward the final truth while aiding those who are poor to reach a human standard of living. The role of the great religions is to draw together their values, as ingredients in the ethos of a peaceful civilization.

The new world order of the next century will be where all the spiritual and cultural spheres can work together in a coordinated effort that distills what is most valuable and profound in each culture and which is in common to the others. Rather than an "end of history," I see the culmination of history and the re-birth of human civilization in which the concept and reality of an Absolute Being will be at the center of dialogue and of the harmonization of human activity.

The Middle East, the birthplace of our civilization, will experience permanent peace in the not too distant future. The seeds of peace are being planted now, and all of you, by

your presence here and by your permanent commitment, are contributing toward this ultimate goal. I assure you, because the time is propitious, that your energies focused on the higher goal of peace will not be in vain. You can make an important and vital contribution toward settling ancient conflicts and broadening the basis for permanent peace.

Dr. Carazo was President of the Republic of Costa Rica from 1978-82, and is founder and President Emeritus of the University for Peace in San Jose, Costa Rica. In addition to being Chairman of the Summit Council's Board of Presidents, he is also Chairman of its International Commission for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea.

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The problem of peace in the Middle East has been one of the most persistent and vexing challenges of the post-war international order. Political, territorial, religious, and ethnic disputes in that region have at one time or another fueled the U.S.-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War, threatened world oil supplies, imperiled the survival of the State of Israel, and even driven deep fissures between the United States and its Western allies. Since 1945, the Middle East has almost unquestionably been the world's primary engine of instability.

With the end of the Cold War, the new Middle East power balance following the Gulf War and new political dynamics in both Israel and the Arab states have created an unprecedented opportunity to make real progress toward a lasting peace. The early 1990s have witnessed the birth of a new Middle East peace process, which through May 1993 had produced nine tone-setting meetings among the key players. Israel, the Palestinians, Syria, and other actors in the Middle East political drama have displayed flexibility and agreed to concessions that would have been impossible, or at least astounding two or three years ago. The moment is pregnant with opportunity.

But with opportunity comes risk — the danger that Middle Eastern governments will forfeit their chance and that the moment will be lost. Clearly, it is now time for all concerned with peace in the Middle East to make themselves heard, to influence policymakers to seize this fleeting opportunity.

It was for this reason that the Summit Council for World Peace assembled in Washington, D.C. an eminent group of experts on the Middle East. The purpose of the roundtable was to examine the status of the peace process and see what new ideas or thoughts a group of distinguished academics, journalists, and government officials could produce. The Council held no illusions about being able to produce any final answers; as with the peace talks themselves, however, the Council believed that the process itself — the exchange of views among Americans, Israelis, and Arabs — would be of value.

In short, the roundtable was not necessarily designed to produce specific recommendations or areas of consensus. Given this fact, the sponsors were pleasantly surprised at the degree of agreement reached by the group. This report's final section spells out that consensus.

Introductory Remarks

Welcoming remarks were delivered by H. E. Rodrigo Carazo, former president of the Republic of Costa Rica, president emeritus of the University for Peace in Costa Rica, and Chairman of the Summit Council's Board of Presidents. As a preface to the Roundtable's deliberations he stated: "My belief is that true peace emerges not when one party defeats another. It comes about only when two opposing factions go beyond their differences to come to important agreements....[P]eace and a new world order will not be the result of the capitulation of one side to the other, not the victory of one over the other, but will arise through the commonality of values, purpose and understanding of the present cultural spheres working together."

The Chairman of the Roundtable, Ambassador Robert G. Neumann, opened the proceedings with a number of introductory remarks. Ambassador Neumann reminded the group that the Roundtable occurred at a propitious moment, just after the ninth session of Middle East peace talks. Although few concrete agreements have so far emerged from the talks, Ambassador Neumann stressed that the very fact that they have occurred is a sign of progress, and should lead observers to be optimistic despite the historic prevalence of strife and conflict in the region.

Ambassador Neumann outlined four specific considerations for the group to keep in mind during their day-and-a-half of deliberations. First, he noted that U.S. policy is complicated by its contradictory origins and impulses: oil and Israel. Franklin D. Roosevelt's meeting with King Abdul Aziz (Ibn Saud) and Harry Truman's decision to recognize the State of Israel represent the historical origins of these two lines of thought. Today, the priorities of oil and the security of both Israel and the moderate Arab states seem often to be in conflict; a just and lasting Middle East peace is the only way this contradiction can be healed. This is why all U.S. governments have stressed an active peace policy in the Middle East.

Second, Ambassador Neumann noted that U.S. leadership would be critical in the Middle East peace talks. But at the same time, he urged the participants to recognize the limits to U.S. power — particularly insofar as Washington could, or should, attempt to pressure actors in the process.

A third point was a fact brought home again by the Yugoslav crisis: it is very difficult to get people who do not want to live together to do so peacefully. And because this task is so arduous, momentum toward peaceful resolution of ethnic, religious, and national disputes can easily be lost; carefully designed accords — such as the Vance-Owen accord in Yugoslavia — can easily be overtaken by hostile events.

Fourth and finally, Ambassador Neumann stressed the importance of the concept of a peace process. The process itself has important benefits; just getting the various sides to the table has produced new levels of mutual understanding and, perhaps, cooperation. This was not to suggest, Ambassador Neumann emphasized, that the process could be allowed to drag on perpetually without results; to the contrary, without concrete results the peace process will become subject to apathy in Washington and extremist criticisms

throughout the Middle East. But the peace process can be said to have advantages in addition to the actual resolution of specific disputes.

The Palestinian Dimension

Following the Ambassador's introduction, conference participants moved on to the first substantive area: the Palestinian perspective on the peace process. Clearly, Palestinian concerns lie at the heart of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and no comprehensive peace will be possible without some resolution of this fundamental issue. The participants heard both a review of the official Palestinian position and a set of more informal remarks.

The basic Palestinian mood in the wake of the ninth session of the Madrid peace process is one of disappointment. A few signs of progress did emerge during this period — the Israeli release of some of the deported Arabs alleged to be supporters of Hamas, a more active U.S. role — but several Palestinian participants explained that they had been led to expect more, especially on the question of limited self-rule in the Occupied Territories. Meanwhile, human rights and economic conditions in the Occupied Territories are alleged to have deteriorated in past months, a point on which several Palestinian and U.S. participants concurred.

The eventual Palestinian goal of course remains an independent state. For the time being, however, in the first of the two steps toward self-rule suggested by the Camp David agreement, Palestinians are looking for something less: interim self-government of all the Occupied Territories under a single authority; concrete forms of political jurisdiction, such as the right to impose taxes, issue identification cards, and provide water and sewage service; and improved respect for Palestinian rights in the interim period before true independence. Palestinian participants made repeated reference to United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call for Israeli withdrawal from territories seized in the 1967 war.

This first speaker addressed the important question of the relationship between the two phases, between interim and complete self-rule. Because of the political volatility of the concept of a Palestinian state, he said, the Palestinian people had agreed to a phased approach. But he emphasized that Palestinian leaders would be adamant in insisting that no steps taken in the first phase serve to legitimize long-term Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories, or undermine the eventual goal of a Palestinian state. An interim government, in other words, would be no long-term substitute for an independent one.

The second Palestinian speaker gave a somewhat more personal presentation. The Palestinian people remained under a dark cloud, he said; they had become fully involved in the peace process — an important step forward — but could not yet anticipate a successful outcome. Where should the Palestinians put their hope, he asked? In whose hands? The Israelis? The Arab states? The Americans?

His answer, in essence, was that the Palestinians could trust none of these parties. The best they could do was attempt to make the consciences of the Israeli people their

weapon, and appeal to that conscience until the Israelis departed the Occupied Territories and agreed to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

This participant argued that all parties outside Israel — the United Nations, the Arab states, the United States — were, for one reason or another, too weak to intervene on behalf of the Palestinian people. And yet some resolution must be found, he suggested, because the only alternative to peace for Palestinians and Israelis was mutual suicide. His preferred option, then, was for the Palestinian people to appeal to world and Israeli senses of morality while working slowly through the United Nations to obtain tougher enforcement of Security Council Resolution 242.

For a time, he suggested, the Palestinians had lost their morality, their conscience: they hijacked aircraft, planted bombs, and pursued other terrorist measures as the prime instrument of their struggle — just as, this participant argued, the Israeli army in the Occupied Territories was using violence and human rights abuses for political ends today. Now, he contended, the Palestinians have rediscovered their morality, and no longer commonly use violence against innocent people as a political tool. Their task should be to encourage the Israelis — through nonviolent protest and political education — to do the same.

This participant took a somewhat different position than the first speaker on the question of phasing. He was less comfortable with the idea of waiting through an initial period of “interim rule” in order to achieve statehood. The object of the Palestinians’ moral persuasion, he suggested, ought to be complete Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the rapid creation of a Palestinian state. Decades of frustration, he argued, had deprived the Palestinians of the ability to wait indefinitely for a true state.

During the discussion session, these two participants, as well as others, called on the United States to become involved in the talks as an active partner rather than an honest observer. And they stressed that improved conditions in the Occupied Territories should be conceived as an Israeli responsibility, not an Israeli “concession” to be acquired through bargaining in the peace talks.

The Israeli Dimension

By itself, the Israeli government constitutes one side of the Middle East peace process. On the other are ranged a number of Arab governments and the stateless Palestinians. Standing slightly away from the table, closer to the Israelis than the Arabs, is the United States. The position of the Israeli government may therefore be the single most important in the Middle East equation, because it alone represents one-half of the Arab-Israeli dispute. The roundtable turned next to a consideration of Israeli policies and perspectives under a new, Labor government.

The first participant to outline the Israeli view of the current situation stressed that the current Rabin government is dedicated to making demonstrable progress toward peace. A more forthcoming attitude toward the peace progress, and the promise to achieve concrete results in it, were two of the defining campaign themes of the Labor

Party in the last election. Very little outside pressure was required, this participant contended, because Israel has its own very strong internal reasons for needing a peace agreement.

This conclusion was supported, argued the speaker, by a review of Israel's domestic political situation. On the left is the Meretz party, a grouping of three factions with nothing in common except a desire for progress in the peace talks. This party supports the peace process and would, in fact, disintegrate without that process as a unifying theme.

Within the ruling Labor party, this participant suggested, perhaps half the members of parliament were openly supportive of the peace talks, and were close to the Meretz position in this sense. All members desired some political solution to the country's security problems. And Prime Minister Rabin has the strongest possible motives to push hard for a settlement: a broad-based Arab-Israeli peace could be his historical legacy. Without one, both the left and the right wings would prey upon the Labor party's failure to deliver on one of its defining issues.

Finally, there is the small, religious Shas party. The speaker argued that, while its members remain relatively hawkish, the Shas leadership has endorsed the peace process and, unlike Shamir's Likud government, is truly interested in reaching an agreement.

Meanwhile public opinion in Israel has shifted slightly to the dovish side, for a number of reasons. The idea of interim self-government or autonomy has been influential, this participant contended, in accustoming Israelis to the idea of some form of Palestinian self-rule. A decade and a half of successful peace with Egypt has reassured Israelis about the effect of peace accords.

But the speaker pointed out that Israelis are still wary of negotiations with the Arab world, and public opinion establishes severe constraints on Israel's room for maneuver. Any settlement must contain strong provisions for Israeli security; the impact of the Six-Day War, in which many Israelis felt their vulnerability in a very immediate way, remains powerful. Many Israelis retain an emotional attachment to the religiously significant portions of the Occupied Territories, including the areas once known as Judea and Samaria. And when the Palestinians attempted to bring the weight of the whole Arab world to the negotiating table, the effect was to worry the Israelis and redouble their security concerns.

This speaker's message, then, was simple. Israel has more incentive than any time in recent memory for making real progress in peace talks. But at the same time, Israel, like the Palestinians and the Arab states, has weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and these must be taken into account when viewing Israeli actions.

During the discussion period, this speaker was asked why Israel was not more forthcoming in its definition of autonomy for the Palestinians. He replied that Israel has a unique perspective on the notion of "autonomy." An Israeli hard-liner had explained to the speaker his opposition to interim self-rule by saying, "In 1948, Israel had only a quarter of what the Palestinians want — and look what we did with it!" In other words, autonomy or self-rule is what you make of it.

Finally, a Palestinian participant asked why Israel would not recognize the PLO if it did not want the Palestinians to bring other Arab states to the table. The speaker admitted that there was tension in this position, but said that, in effect, Israel had already recognized the Palestinians as a legitimate political body; it had allowed them into the talks, recently abandoned the law against talking with PLO members, and even invited a quasi-PLO official to play a role in the peace talks. But the PLO itself, and particularly Yasir Arafat, have been so “demonized” in Israel (and, U.S. participants agreed, among the American Jewish community) that, until the organization has new leadership, formal recognition is politically impossible for Israel (and the United States).

The Arab Dimension

On the other side of the table from the Israelis sit the various Arab governments of the Middle East. But the Arab world is more than a collection of individual states; it also has certain very powerful senses of collective political, economic, and social destiny that are relevant to the peace process. It was this broader Arab dimension that next came under review.

The initial speaker on the subject emphasized the theme of Arab unity. Some academic and political observers of the Middle East, he suggested, are promoting a “new realism” that holds Arab unity to be a relic of the past rather than a prescription for the future. This participant disagreed with that view and argued that the 1990s might see a renewed drive for Arab unity.

Two trends at work on the international political scene support this conclusion, the speaker contended. One is the regionalization and globalization of such issues such as drugs, terrorism, migration, the environment, and human rights; these imperatives called for pan-Arab, as much as pan-European or pan-American, approaches. Second is the fragmentation of civil societies as seen in ethnic conflicts around the world, which works to undermine loyalties to nation-states and build support for broader ethnic or religious identities.

Moreover, the reasons for the failure of Arab nationalism in the past are declining. One was the Arab inability to face up to the Israeli challenge; that goal will now hopefully be achieved through the peace process. The second barrier to Arab nationalism was a lack of democracy and a tolerance for the denial of human rights. As democratic systems become more common in the Arab world, popular support for Arab nationalism will have an opportunity to emerge, and the Arab nationalist project will no longer be tainted by the perception that it is opposed to human rights.

This speaker suggested that perhaps the fundamental choice faced by the Arab states today relates to geopolitical orientation. Will the Arab world concentrate on vertical relations with the developed world, or horizontal ties with other developing countries? In the past, the participant pointed out, many Arab leaders had chosen the former; the “Camp David mind-set” upheld the primary importance of vertical relationships. A

return to Arab nationalism will require a shift in this perception and a rededication to inter-Arab relations and other horizontal forms of diplomacy.

To make progress in the peace talks, the participant suggested, Arab states will need to overcome two fundamental asymmetries. The first involves strategic relationships: Israel remains an ally of the United States, but many Arab states have lost their military and political sponsor with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The second asymmetry exists within the Arab world, whose currently most powerful member (Syria) has the least at stake (the Golan Heights) while its least powerful member (the Palestinians) has everything at stake.

The implication of these various ideas, and the speaker's conclusion, were clear enough. Unless the Arab states develop greater coordination among themselves, he argued, they cannot succeed in the peace talks. No agreement would be possible, and certainly not one favorable — or perhaps even fair — to the Arab side. Only a united Arab world, in short, can underwrite a truly lasting Middle East peace.

The second speaker on this topic agreed that the Arab states came to the current session of peace talks in a position of weakness. The prevailing political order in Arab states, he suggested, has failed the Arab people miserably, particularly in terms of the distribution of wealth, relations with Israel, and democracy. All major Arab states face internal as well as external challenges, many based in the growing power of Islam.

Arab weakness, in the opinion of this participant, holds one dramatic lesson for Middle East peace: a more active and more neutral U.S. role is indispensable to offset the asymmetries that now make progress difficult. If the United States does not become more active and the peace process collapses, this speaker warned that Islamists — who have grown in power in part because their ideology constitutes an alternative to moribund Arab nationalism — would move in to capitalize on the frustration and disappointment in the Arab world.

When looking at areas for flexibility in compromise in the negotiations, this participant distinguished between “fundamentals” and “modalities.” There could be compromise on the latter, he suggested, but not the former. For Syria, the fundamentals constitute nothing less than Sadat obtained for Egypt in the Camp David accords, most notably the avoidance of territorial concessions; the modalities — the specific arrangements reached to demilitarize the Golan Heights or the particular shape of Palestinian autonomy — are negotiable. For the Palestinians, the goal of statehood and Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the interim solution of partial self rule in all territories are the fundamentals; the definition of self-rule and the timetable for statehood are somewhat flexible.

In the discussion session, one participant made the point that the creation of a democratic Palestinian state would promote democracy throughout the region — partly by serving as an example, and partly by resolving an issue that has been an excuse to deny human rights in other Arab nations. The position of Syria was discussed, with several participants noting that Syria is inextricably linked to the Palestinians; that Assad needs gradualism in peace accords, in part to build public support; and that Syrian-Israeli

negotiations will press ahead independent of Palestinian-Israeli ones, although opinions differed as to whether Assad would actually make a separate peace (most participants believed that he could not).

The American Jewish Community

Almost as important as Israeli public opinion is the status of opinion among the American Jewish community. Few interest groups in the United States exercise such a powerful effect on public policy as do American Jews, and their opinions will be of great import as Washington attempts to negotiate the treacherous waters of dialogue and compromise in the peace process. The roundtable therefore turned next to the evolving attitudes of the American Jewish community.

The speaker provided a detailed history of the Zionist idea; the major lesson was that Zionism was a secular ideology promoted by secular Jews, often against the strident arguments of religiously oriented Jews, both reform and orthodox. Zionism was a political response to the persecution of Jews in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, and not primarily a religious phenomenon. This must be kept in mind, the speaker suggested, by observers of the Israeli political scene.

In the American Jewish community, this participant stressed, there is a growing dovishness that matches the evolution of public opinion in Israel today. Left-wing peace groups that previously had operated more on the fringe, such as Peace Now in Israel and Americans for Peace Now, operate today firmly within the political mainstream. Over time, the arguments of the Rabin government are converting more and more American Jews to the notion that a peace agreement is in Israel's interests. (The speaker told one anecdote about an American Jewish activist complaining at a rally about a notion related to Palestinian self-rule; when informed that this was the official position of the Rabin government, the activist replied, "Well, it must be all right, then.")

During the course of the Rabin government, the participant concluded, the rhetoric and advocacy of peace would become firmly established within the American Jewish community. Even traditionally hawkish groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) are showing signs of moderation. Even if the Labor government lost the next election, the speaker predicted, the legacy of support for real results in the peace process would continue among American Jewry, at least for a time.

The Syrian Perspective

Syria is perhaps the most important individual Arab player in the peace process. Its connection to the Golan Heights dispute, its close involvement in the Palestinian problem and its role as Israel's greatest security threat endow it with influence and import in the peace talks. Two participants addressed current Syrian motives and priorities.

The first speaker examined several key issues facing the Syrian leadership. One was the question of democracy. In Israel, he said, the people had become more dovish,

while the government continued to defend a relatively hard line. In the Arab world, the opposite is true — perhaps a majority of many Arab populations oppose a peace settlement, while the governments, such as Syria, understand that they must attempt to pursue one. This difference both calls the value of Arab democracy into question and underlines the constraints under which Syria's President Assad is operating.

The second issue is related to Assad himself and his role in the peace process. Assad today is at the height of his powers, with a powerful military establishment, a relatively docile public, his main rival Iraq defeated, and his relations with the West as warm as ever. If Assad cannot deliver Syria in a comprehensive peace accord now, this participant contended, none of his likely successors would be able to do so.

The speaker's third subject was Syria's basic objectives in the peace talks. These amount to comprehensive peace including a resolution of the Golan Heights issue without abandoning the Palestinians. In other words, Assad's goal — the “full peace” to which he has referred — means emulating the Egyptian model in the Camp David accords in every respect except leaving the Palestinians out in the cold. This participant was very clear that Israel should not expect a separate peace on the Golan issue alone; Assad does not have the political leeway to abandon the Palestinians even if he wanted to.

The second speaker reviewed the history of Syria's role in the Middle East, from its rejectionism of peace talks and attempt to acquire military parity with Israel to its loss of its Soviet sponsor to its decision to join the Madrid round of talks. Syria has always been more moderate than commonly believed, this participant contended; Syrian forces, for example, had never initiated military attacks on Israel. But a number of factors have now conspired to bring Syria to the table: the loss of Soviet backing, the defeat of Saddam Hussein and the attendant weakening of the Arab bloc that opposed peace with Israel, and Assad's recognition that his earlier, more confrontational regional policies had failed.

To demonstrate its good faith, this speaker pointed out, Syria has taken a number of bold steps in recent years. It has dropped its objection to direct talks with Israel, abandoned its parallel demand to international talks (rather than negotiations among the parties themselves) under the auspices of the UN, and eased its precondition that Israel vacate the Golan Heights before any talks begin.

This participant agreed that Syria was after a phased Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, and that, on balance, Assad probably could not move ahead with an agreement on that while leaving the Palestinians without a peace accord of their own. Assad might straddle the choice, however, by going ahead and implementing a Golan accord once the theoretical foundations for a Palestinian settlement had been put in place. From the U.S. and Israeli perspective, too, this speaker noted that a separate Syrian/Israeli peace would create the conditions for instability, not stability, and should therefore be opposed.

In the discussion period, both speakers agreed that Syrian public opinion would not prevent a peace agreement: one, because he thought the Syrians would not like it but would go along and eventually (as the Egyptians had) grow to appreciate it; and two, because he found real enthusiasm in some quarters in Syria for a peace agreement. Both agreed that Assad would accept the presence of several thousand U.S. or UN

peacekeepers on the Golan as the price for Israeli withdrawal, as long as Syrian sovereignty over the Golan was recognized by all parties.

The Egyptian Dimension

While Syria is perhaps more closely entangled in the peace process today, Egypt remains the linchpin of the Arab world whose political, economic, and social stability are critical to its role in encouraging Middle East peace. Egypt's economic and political position were the next topics of discussion, and were examined by two participants.

The first speaker summarized Egypt's economic situation. During the 1970s and 1980s, Egypt faced massive economic problems, including a drop in oil revenues, a growing foreign debt, ballooning annual budget deficits equal to 20 percent of GDP, and inefficient government control of public sector monopolies and imports. Beset by these difficulties, Egyptian GDP growth declined from 10 percent a year in the 1970s to 2 percent or less annually by the late 1980s; inflation jumped to an annual rate of 20 percent.

To combat this situation, the Egyptian government has embarked on an economic reform program. Its principles are decentralization, market-based management, and an outward-oriented economy. The government has loosened controls over investment capital, pursued domestic price liberalization, and sought to create a more pure market system to bolster competitiveness.

The results of this program are already evident. During the last six months of 1992, Egyptian economic performance was better than expected: the economy grew slightly, rather than declining as had been anticipated; inflation declined to an annual rate of 10 percent, the lowest in ten years; Egypt registered a foreign trade surplus of \$5.9 billion; its fiscal deficit dropped from 20 percent to 6 percent of GDP; and, since 1991, roughly \$400 million in state-run enterprises have been sold off to private concerns.

Egypt's economy still faces real problems, including an export sector vulnerable to world price fluctuations (in oil and cotton), a severe housing shortage (the country has only seven million of the twelve million housing units it needs), unemployment, and a continuing — and perhaps worsening — problem of income distribution. Nonetheless, this participant's message was that, with a few more years of economic reform, bolstered by outside assistance, Egypt might reach an unprecedented level of economic stability and become truly self-sufficient. Among other things, this development would allow the United States to slash its economic assistance to Egypt.

The second speaker focused on three specific issues that relate to Egypt's role in the Middle East today. First, he reiterated the importance, from Egypt's perspective, of the peace process itself. Egypt's own experience demonstrates how long-entrenched positions can change, seemingly inflexible positions can soften, and unrepentant adversaries can find common ground during the period of negotiations.

But second, this speaker emphasized the fact that the situation is constantly changing. The very shifts in perception and policy that underpin the current optimism can reverse themselves in a matter of months or weeks.

Third and finally, this participant urged the group to appreciate the connection between domestic politics and foreign policy. The two are not separate, he said; they are interwoven, for Egypt, as for all parties to the talks. Even apparently non-democratic Arab states are not immune to public opinion, and this must be borne in mind when thinking of the peace process.

During the discussion, one participant commented on Egypt's role in the current peace process. When asked if Egypt was serving as a sort of neutral intermediary between the Israelis and other Arab states, the participant replied, in effect no and yes: no, because, as an Arab state, Egypt itself could not be a "neutral broker" between Arabs and Israelis; but yes, in a manner of thinking, because Egypt's experience with a successful fifteen-year peace accord gives it unique authority when advising other Arab states on the current round of talks. Egypt's strong interest in a comprehensive peace will lead it to continue this support and encouragement for the peace process.

The Jordanian Dimension

The participant charged with outlining the Jordanian position in the peace process today noted that in this country, perhaps more than any other in the region, social, political, and economic matters intersect with security concerns and the country's stance at the peace talks. Jordan's basic demographic facts tell the story of its precarious situation: its population of four million has a 3.4 percent growth rate; it includes two million Palestinians; almost 30 percent of Jordanians are clustered in the capital of Amman; fully 43 percent of the people are under the age of fifteen; 43 percent of all employed workers draw their paycheck from the government; and the rate of unemployment, 18 percent overall, is 33 percent for educated Jordanians.

Clearly, Jordan's socioeconomic mix is a volatile one. That mix is rent, the speaker noted, by three dichotomies: Islamists versus non-Islamists, haves versus have-nots, and Jordanians versus Palestinians. Those potential conflicts have been kept at bay because of King Hussein's role as a unifying force, the mood of hope attendant to the peace process, the use of democracy as a vent for tensions, and other factors. But any of the dichotomies could be sparked into violence at any time.

In particular, the participant explained, if the peace process were destroyed, the leash on those three fissures in Jordanian society would be loosened and the hope for relief of social and political ills would dim. Jordan will therefore benefit as much as any nation from a peace accord.

Jordan's position, and particularly that of King Hussein, faces another dilemma in the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, the decline of U.S.-Soviet rivalry raised great hopes that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be treated on its own merits rather than as a proxy of the superpower debate, and thus be resolved. This hope is manifest in the peace process. But on the other hand, Jordan, for the most part a loyal friend of the West during that period, now faces a reckoning of sorts within the Arab world. Some anti-Western elements may wish to hold Jordan's government accountable for its policies. King

Hussein had just begun grappling with this dilemma when the Gulf War struck, and it makes his subsequent refusal to openly oppose Saddam Hussein all the more understandable.

The U.S. Dimension

Finally, one participant outlined the basis for U.S. policy in the Middle East. The surprising degree of continuity in U.S. policy since 1967 can be explained in part by the consistent interests at stake. Three such interests have remained constant: the security of oil supplies; the security and survival of the State of Israel; and the security of those Arab states that are geostrategically important and are in the hands of friendly governments. During the Cold War, the fourth interest had to do with preventing Soviet inroads into the region; that has now been replaced, in the Clinton Administration, with an emphasis on promoting democracy and human rights.

This speaker echoed Ambassador Neumann's comment at the beginning of the roundtable: the two fundamental aspects of those U.S. interests are contradictory. It is for this reason that the United States cannot simply walk away from the peace talks; while Washington could have preserved one or the other of those interests through a more unilateralist, balance-of-power policy, achieving both (or all) simultaneously requires a lasting peace.

President Clinton's foreign policy in the Middle East will have four central elements, according to this participant. They include promoting Arab-Israeli peace and the pace of the peace talks, containing both Iran and Iraq, restraining the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and promoting a vision of a more democratic and prosperous region in the wake of the peace process.

Despite the efforts of the two major enemies to the peace process — the radical enemies of any peace and the psychological risk that hope might not be kept alive — various powerful factors have created an opportunity for peace that is unprecedented in recent times. Therefore, this participant predicted that the United States would play an even more dynamic role in the talks. Washington would be faithful to its own ideas of what works, be sensitive to the perceptions of the regional governments, and recognize that, in the end, the Arabs and the Israelis, and not the United States, would actually make the peace. But the speaker argued that the United States would nonetheless try to push the envelope of dialogue as far as it could be pushed.

Areas of Consensus

As noted at the outset, the intent of this roundtable was not necessarily to produce a consensus document. Its goal was a free-flowing, open, honest dialogue aimed at improving mutual understanding and, where possible, producing a few nuggets of insight or suggestion that might be shared with the actual participants in the peace process.

Nonetheless, during the course of the seminar, a line of thought emerged that, somewhat surprisingly, constituted a far-reaching degree of consensus. The conclusions below do not in any way suggest specific means for resolving the manifold issues confronting the negotiators; rather, they attempt to set the current talks in the proper context and draw a few implications. If taken seriously, they would not so much influence what goes on at the talks, as influence the seriousness and energy with which people and governments approach them. A few specific recommendations are included at the end.

1. The Importance of the Moment.

All participants agreed that we have today a once-in-a-generation opportunity to achieve meaningful progress in the Middle East peace talks. We must not underestimate the value of this moment; bringing Israel and all the Arab parties together was a watershed event in the history of the peace process. The juxtaposition of the Rabin government in Israel, the Palestinian public and leadership's commitment to negotiations, Syria's genuine interest in a worthwhile outcome, the active and constructive Egyptian and Jordanian roles, and the evolution of American Jewish opinion creates a constellation of factors that may not be seen again for decades.

It must also be understood, as the participants unanimously suggested, that a just and lasting peace is the only way simultaneously to meet all the important interests of the major parties involved. It is the only way to grant Palestinian self-rule while preserving Israeli security, to resolve the Golan Heights dispute without humiliating one or both parties, to slow the regional arms race and allow governments to redirect resources from guns to social development, to allow the United States to bridge the gap between its contradictory interests of oil and Israel, and to create a solid foundation for long-term stability.

Yet just as these hopes have emerged over the last two years, most participants warned that they could also disappear with little or no warning. Perhaps the overriding characteristic of the Middle East is its changeability, its unpredictability. An atmosphere favorable to a settlement can quickly degenerate into a hostile stand-off in which there is no hope for serious progress. The fragility of the current moment is dramatically illustrated by the fact that one of its indispensable elements was a single, close-run election in Israel, without which the Shamir government would have remained in power, dedicated to avoiding a true peace accord.

The situation is complicated by the fact that further delay could be fatal to the process. As will be suggested below, many participants agreed that the very existence of the peace process is an important step and carries its own benefits. But the longer it drags on without concrete results, all the members of the roundtable feared, the more frustration will build in capitals and among populaces. Within the Middle East, radical parties will feed off that frustration and resentment and call

for violence and a rejection of peace; in the United States, the Clinton Administration could grow weary of expending great amounts of energy on an apparently fruitless process.

If the peace process fails, the consequences could be very serious. All near-term hope for a lasting peace and for the achievement of Palestinian self-rule would be lost. Arab-Israeli tension would mount; the Labor government in Israel, having justified its rule partly on a pledge to make something happen in the peace process, might fall from power in the next election; and public outcries and uprisings in Arab states might mandate a return to hard-line policies in Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. Especially in these last two countries, the hopes generated by the peace process have played a major role in dampening social and political complaints. And, at the end, the radical Islamists and other extremists would be there to pick up the pieces and refashion a much more dangerous, hateful Middle East.

All of this returns us to the theme mentioned at the outset of this report. The next six months to a year is perhaps the most critical time in Middle East peace talks in two decades or more. Progress must be achieved; the moment is fleeting, and without concrete progress the talks could collapse.

2. The Importance of a Process.

Virtually all participants emphasized that, though tangible results are certainly needed, the peace process itself carries certain advantages. Regular peace talks produce dialogue, an exchange of concerns, and hopefully, some level of mutual understanding. Few participants at the roundtable doubted the great benefits achieved in the Egyptian-Israeli relationship through the Camp David process and the fifteen years of peace that followed it, and none doubt that similar benefits can slowly be achieved in other Arab- Israeli relations. Even the nine brief meetings held so far in the Madrid process have had an important salutary effect.

But if the notion of process is valuable, many participants warned that it can also be dangerous. There is no direct parallel in Arab language or politics for the notion of an open-ended process. Arab peoples prefer to have some idea of where they are going, where their governments are taking them, before they embark on a political journey. Talking for talking's sake may be a well-established notion in the West, but it would appear pointless to many Arabs. Here again we see the need for real progress.

3. Agents of Progress: Those Who Cannot Act.

There is simply no alternative to the peace process. The question, then, is not so much — as one participant phrased it — will the peace process be infused with a new life, legitimacy, and credibility, but rather, how will that be done? And the participants agreed that this question leads immediately to another: Who will do it?

As suggested above, and as generally agreed at the roundtable, the Arab states are in no position to lead, to make bold new initiatives. Partly this stems from the disequilibrium between Israeli power and Arab power today, and from the asymmetrical concerns of the Arab states themselves. It is also a product of the uncertain message of Arab nationalism: only a united Arab voice can endorse a truly lasting peace, but such a voice will demand a model for peace that Israel may perceive to be imbalanced.

And then there is the issue of democracy. Domestic and foreign policies in the Arab states are interwoven, especially in the more democratic areas (such as Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories) but even in more authoritarian states as well (such as Syria). Without public support, any Arab signatures will be written in a diplomatic form of disappearing ink, and will fade with a change of political winds. Arab governments could rally their people behind a peace accord and create the foundations for its long-term survival; however, public opinion in Arab states remains a fragile commodity and this restrains the governments from true leadership.

For similar reasons, Israel cannot be expected to show more leadership than it already has. Rabin has a mandate of sorts, but it is only to bring home a treaty that meets Israeli security needs. His government's early actions, moreover, would suggest that he feels a need to protect himself against accusations from the right. We cannot expect a substantially more flexible or innovative Israeli stance in the coming months.

The inability of the United Nations to take charge of the peace talks is self-evident. The UN has proven incapable of managing crises in Bosnia and other locations, and certainly cannot be expected to intervene in the Middle East and enforce a settlement. It has historically been unable to make even Security Council resolutions, such as 242 and 338, stick. The Palestinians may use it as a forum to air their grievances and seek favorable world opinion, but it will not send a representative to the talks and begin urging specific courses of action.

4. The Importance of the U.S. Role.

This leaves one actor with the power and the credibility to serve as a catalyst for the peace talks: the United States.

In order to play this role, Washington will have to overcome a number of hurdles and recognize some specific limitations. The contradiction between its two fundamental interests of oil and Israel can impose constraints on its flexibility. But those constraints will not be evenly balanced: at the end of the day, the United States — and all actors must recognize this — is, for political and historic reasons, not a completely neutral actor. It is biased toward Israel. Washington operates under severe political constraints when dealing with the issues, both from the pro-Israel lobby and the anti-foreign aid sentiment in the United States. Congress and the American people are focused on domestic concerns, and the quasi-isolationism

at large in the United States today may prevent Washington from proposing dramatic solutions. The United States cannot make peace in the Middle East; only the Arabs and Israelis can do that. The best Washington can do is help create a supportive context for negotiations among the regional states and peoples.

Despite these constraints, there is no alternative to U.S. leadership in the Middle East peace talks. Virtually all participants at the roundtable therefore agreed that the United States should become even more actively involved in the talks, and consider joining them as an active player rather than retaining its role as an "honest broker." Roundtable participants were aware of the U.S. intention to take a more active role, and wished to support and encourage this decision, and perhaps even propose a more decisive U.S. stance than U.S. officials are now considering.

5. Issues To Be Discussed.

Most roundtable participants concurred that, once the United States takes a more active role, its chief task will be to develop constructive suggestions for resolving what most participants believed are the two central issues in the current round of talks: the definition of Palestinian autonomy and the means of addressing regional security concerns. In both cases, before proposing specific options, the United States must decide what it is willing to bring to the table.

Definition of autonomy. There are a number of sub-issues involved in this question: the value of the two-step process of interim self-rule and full statehood; the actual elements of interim self-rule; and the mechanisms for protecting Palestinian rights prior to full statehood. Roundtable participants did not presume to prejudge the answer to any of these questions. All agreed, however, that the issues in the Syrian-Israeli dispute would be much easier to resolve than the Palestinian problem, and so it is the latter that needs fuller attention.

U.S. officials, however, must ask themselves an important question before joining this issue: what might the United States contribute to it? Would the United States, with the United Nations, be willing to extend some form of guarantees to the Palestinians that their rights will be respected and the terms of interim self-rule will be faithfully implemented? If so, how might such guarantees be designed? What can the United States do to assuage Israel's security concerns?

In this connection, most roundtable participants were agreed on one delicate issue: while the peace talks are underway, conditions for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories must improve. Many things are negotiable, but fundamental human rights are not. Few at the conference attempted to lay blame or make accusations; what strikes one observer as violation of rights might appear to another as a legitimate security operation. Nonetheless, for political as well as for moral reasons, the United States might consider ways of more actively pursuing the limited objective of improving Palestinian living conditions.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials may wish to make new efforts to convince Palestinian leaders of the value of even limited autonomy, and the opportunity such a step would present to begin building institutions, unity, and nationhood — much as Israel did during the 1940s and particularly after 1948. Working with the Israelis and Palestinians, U.S. officials might help draw up a specific list of institutions — schools, local government organs, newspapers, civic associations, clubs, and the like — that Israel would agree not to close or ban once interim self-rule was underway. This process might reinforce for the Palestinians the potential value of autonomy while providing specific guarantees as to its scope.

Regional security concerns. All the prospective parties to a peace accord have their security concerns, perhaps no more intense than those of Israel. No state will sign a peace agreement that it does not believe protects its fundamental security interests.

Here the question for the United States, and its friends and allies in the United Nations, is more direct: What forms of security guarantees would the United States or the UN be willing to grant? The proposal for a peacekeeping force of several thousand troops on the Golan has been much discussed, and may well come to pass. But what of the Occupied Territories? What of Jerusalem? How many troops could the hard-pressed UN, which soon will have over 60,000 troops under its command in the field, be able to spare for a new Middle Eastern endeavor? Would memories of the Beirut bombing prevent the United States from playing a major role in such an enterprise? It seems clear that any U.S. pledge would have to be based on a public relations campaign conducted by the President and designed to spark the public's imagination.

6. Specific Recommendations

In addition to the general conclusions mentioned above, virtually all roundtable participants concurred with the following specific proposals.

A. All parties to the talks should consider establishing regularized official and unofficial dialogues aimed at producing constructive suggestions to take place on a parallel track to the official negotiations. This Summit Council roundtable could be one such example.

B. The United States and other donor nations should continue economic aid at current levels to all parties involved in the talks. Socioeconomic difficulties are the source of many instabilities in the Middle East, and such aid is important to keep the ground fertile and stable for continued progress.

C. Israel and all Arab states should establish a “peace curriculum” in their schools, preferably at the grade or high school levels, to begin creating a “peace culture” in the Middle East. This process of education for peace would have to be assisted and perhaps monitored from the outside, perhaps by such institutions as the University for Peace in Costa Rica and the United States Institute of Peace.

D. More attention needs to be given to the notion of a Palestinian-Jordanian-Israeli political and economic confederation, on the Benelux model, in the wake of a peace agreement. Such a confederation might make economic sense and could build on the achievement of a peace agreement. It is, of course, a long-term notion.

E. The Summit Council is encouraged to continue its efforts to avail itself and its resources to facilitate the peace process in the region.

The basic theme of this roundtable could be summed up in two words: *only peace*. Only a true and lasting peace provides a true answer to the Middle East's security, political, economic, and social challenges. Only a true and lasting peace will truly and equally protect the twin U.S. concerns of oil and Israel. Peace is the only answer, the next year may be our last chance in a decade to achieve it, and the United States is the only country in a position to produce an agreement and make it stick.

That is a heavy burden to lay on the shoulders of the already overloaded United States. Peace in the Middle East is a grand goal, something that would transform the region's political, social, economic, and military landscape. But every burden is also an opportunity, every duty an invitation to heroism. The United States has a chance today to play a major — even decisive — role in bringing peace, justice, prosperity, and, eventually, democracy to all the people of the Middle East. Such an opportunity is not to be missed.