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America's Faltering Search for Peace in the Middle East: Openings for Others?

Remarks to staff of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, separately, to members of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr. (USFS, Ret.)  
1 September 2010, Oslo, Norway

You have asked me to speak to current American policies in the Middle East, with an emphasis on the prospects for peace in the Holy Land. You have further suggested that I touch on the relationship of the Gulf Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia, to this. It is both an honor and a challenge to address this subject in this capital / at this ministry.

The declaration of principles worked out in Oslo seventeen years ago was the last direct negotiation between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs to reach consequential, positive results. The Oslo accords were a real step toward peace, not another deceptive pseudo-event in an endlessly unproductive, so-called "peace process." And if that one step forward in Oslo in 1993 was followed by several steps backwards, there is a great deal to be learned from how and why that happened.

There can be no doubt about the importance of today's topic. The ongoing conflict in the Holy Land increasingly disturbs the world's conscience as well as its tranquility. The Israel-Palestine issue began as a struggle in the context of European colonialism. In the post-colonial era, tension between Israelis and the Palestinians they dispossessed became, by degrees, the principal source of radicalization and instability in the Arab East and then the Arab world as a whole. It stimulated escalating terrorism against Israelis at home and their allies abroad. Since the end of the Cold War, the interaction between Israel and its captive Palestinian population has emerged as the fountainhead of global strife. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish this strife from a war of religions or a conflict of civilizations.

For better or ill, my own country, the United States has played and continues to play the key international part in this contest. American policies, more than those of any other external actor, have the capacity to stoke or stifle the hatreds in the Middle East and to spread or reverse their infection of the wider world. American policies and actions in the Middle East thus affect much more than that region.

Yet, as I will argue, the United States has been obsessed with process rather than substance. It has failed to involve parties who are essential to peace. It has acted on Israel's behalf to preempt rather than enlist international and regional support for peace. It has defined the issues in ways that preclude rather than promote progress. Its concept of a "peace process" has therefore become the handmaiden of Israeli expansionism rather than a driver for peace. There

are alternatives to tomorrow's diplomatic peace pageant on the Potomac. And, as Norway has shown, there is a role for powers other than America in crafting peace in the Holy Land.

Over thirty years ago, at Camp David, Jimmy Carter pushed Israel through the door to peace that Egypt's Anwar Sadat had opened. Twenty years ago, the first Bush administration pressed Israel to the negotiating table with Palestinian leaders, setting the stage for their clandestine meetings in Oslo. The capacity of the United States to rally other governments behind a cause that it espouses may have atrophied, but American power remains far greater than that of any other nation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Middle East.

For more than four decades, Israel has been able to rely on aid from the United States to dominate its region militarily and to sustain its economic prosperity. It has counted on its leverage in American politics to block the application of international law and to protect itself from the political repercussions of its policies and actions. Unquestioning American support has enabled Israel to put the seizure of ever more land ahead of the achievement of a *modus vivendi* with the Palestinians or other Arabs. Neither violent resistance from the dispossessed nor objections from abroad have brought successive Israeli governments to question, let alone alter the priority they assign to land over peace.

Ironically, Palestinians too have developed a dependency relationship with America. This has locked them into a political framework over which Israel exercises decisive influence. They have been powerless to end occupation, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and other humiliations by Jewish soldiers and settlers. Nor have they been able to prevent their progressive confinement in checkpoint-encircled ghettos on the West Bank and the great open-air prison of Gaza.

Despite this appalling record of failure, the American monopoly on the management of the search for peace in Palestine remains unchallenged. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia – once a contender for countervailing influence in the region – has lapsed into impotence. The former colonial powers of the European Union, having earlier laid the basis for conflict in the region, have largely sat on their hands while ringing them, content to let America take the lead. China, India, and other Asian powers have prudently kept their political and military distance. In the region itself, Iran has postured and exploited the Palestinian cause without doing anything to advance it. Until recently, Turkey remained aloof.

On rare occasions, as in the case of the 1973 Arab oil embargo, the Arabs have backed their verbal opposition to Israel with action. Egypt and Jordan have settled into an unpopular coexistence with Israel that is now sustained only by U.S. subventions. Saudi Arabia has twice taken the initiative to offer Israel diplomatic concessions if it were to conclude arrangements for peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. But, overall, Arab governments have earned the contempt of the Palestinians and their own people for their lack of serious engagement. For the most part, Arab leaders have timorously demanded that America solve the Israel-Palestine problem for them, while obsequiously courting American protection against Israel, each other, Iran, and – in some cases – their own increasingly frustrated and angry subjects and citizens.

Islam charges rulers with the duty to defend the faithful and to uphold justice. It demands that they embody righteousness. The resentment of mostly Muslim Arabs at their governing elites' failure to meet these standards generates sympathy for terrorism directed not just at Israel but at both the United States and Arab governments associated with it.

The perpetrators of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States saw it in part as reprisal for American complicity in Israeli cruelties to Palestinians and other Arabs. They justified it as a strike against Washington's protection of Arab governments willing to overlook American contributions to Muslim suffering. Washington's response to the attack included suspending its efforts to make peace in the Holy Land as well as invading and occupying Afghanistan and Iraq. All three actions inadvertently strengthened the terrorist case for further attacks on America and its allies. The armed struggle between Americans and Muslim radicals has already spilled over to Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and other countries. Authoritative voices in Israel now call for adding Iran to the list of countries at war with America. They are echoed by Zionist and neo-conservative spokesmen in the United States,

The widening involvement of Americans in combat in Muslim lands has inflamed anti-American passions and catalyzed a metastasis of terrorism. It has caused a growing majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims to see the United States as a menace to their faith, their way of life, their homelands, and their personal security. American populists and European xenophobes have meanwhile undercut liberal and centrist Muslim arguments against the intolerance that empowers terrorism by equating terrorism and its extremist advocates with Islam and its followers. The current outburst of bigoted demagoguery over the construction of an Islamic cultural center and mosque in New York is merely the most recent illustration of this. It suggests that the blatant racism and Islamophobia of contemporary Israeli politics is contagious. It rules out the global alliances against religious extremists that are essential to encompass their political defeat.

President Obama's inability to break this pattern must be an enormous personal disappointment to him. He came into office committed to crafting a new relationship with the Arab and Muslim worlds. His first interview with the international media was with Arab satellite television. He reached out publicly and privately to Iran. He addressed the Turkish parliament with persuasive empathy. He traveled to a great center of Islamic learning in Cairo to deliver a remarkably eloquent message of conciliation to Muslims everywhere. He made it clear that he understood the centrality of injustices in the Holy Land to Muslim estrangement from the West. He promised a responsible withdrawal from Iraq and a judicious recrafting of strategy in Afghanistan. Few doubt Mr. Obama's sincerity. Yet none of his initiatives has led to policy change anyone can detect, let alone believe in

It is not for me to analyze or explain the wide gaps between rhetoric and achievement in the Obama Administration's stewardship of so many aspects of my country's affairs. American voters will render their first formal verdict on this two months from tomorrow, on the 2nd of November. The situation in the Holy Land, Iraq, Afghanistan, and adjacent areas is only part of what they will consider as they do so. But I do think it worthwhile briefly to examine some of the changes in the situation that ensure that many policies that once helped us to get by in the Middle East will no longer do this.

Let me begin with the "peace process," a hardy perennial of America's diplomatic repertoire that the Obama Administration will put back on public display tomorrow. In the Cold War, the appearance of an earnest and "even-handed" American search for peace in the Holy Land was the price of U.S. access and influence in the Middle East. It provided political cover for conservative Arab governments to set aside their anger at American backing of Israel so as to stand with America and the Western bloc against Soviet Communism. It kept American relations with Israel and the Arabs from becoming a zero-sum game. It mobilized domestic Jewish support for incumbent presidents. Of course, there hasn't been an American-led "peace process" in the Middle East for at least a decade. Still the conceit of a "peace process" became an essential political convenience for all concerned. No one could bear to admit that the "peace process" had expired. It therefore lived on in phantom form.

Even when there was no "peace process," the possibility of resurrecting one provided hope to the gullible, cover to the guileful, beguilement for the press, an excuse for doing nothing to those gaining from the status quo, and – last but far from least – lifetime employment for career "peace processors." The perpetual processing of peace without the requirement to produce it has been especially appreciated by Israeli leaders. It has enabled them to behave like magicians, riveting foreign attention on meaningless distractions as they systematically removed Palestinians from their homes, settled half a million or more Jews in newly vacated areas of the occupied territories, and annexed a widening swath of land to a Jerusalem they insist belongs only to Israel.

Palestinian leaders with legitimacy problems have also had reason to collaborate in the search for a "peace process." It's not just that there has been no obviously better way to end their people's suffering. Playing "peace process" charades justifies the international patronage and Israeli backing these leaders need to retain their status in the occupied territories. It ensures that they have media access and high-level visiting rights in Washington. Meanwhile, for American leaders, engagement in some sort of Middle East "peace process" has been essential to credibility in the Arab and Islamic worlds, as well as with the ever-generous American Jewish community. Polls show that most American Jews are impatient for peace. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, they are eager to believe in the willingness of the government of Israel to trade land for it.

Previous "peace processes" have exploited all these impulses. In practice, however, these diplomatic distractions have served to obscure Israeli actions and evasions that were more often prejudicial to peace than helpful in achieving it. Behind all the blather, the rumble of bulldozers has never stopped. Given this history, it has taken a year and a half of relentless effort by U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell to persuade the parties even to meet directly to talk about talks as they first did here in Oslo, seventeen years ago. When the curtain goes up on the diplomatic show in Washington tomorrow, will the players put on a different skit? There are many reasons to doubt that they will.

One is that the Obama administration has engaged the same aging impresarios who staged all the previously failed "peace processes" to produce and direct this one with no agreed script. The last time these guys staged such an ill-prepared meeting, at Camp David in 2000, it cost both heads of delegation, Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, their political authority. It led not to peace but to escalating violence. The parties are showing up this time to minimize President Obama's political embarrassment in advance of midterm elections in the United States, not to address his agenda – still less to address each other's agendas. These are indeed difficulties. But the problems with this latest – and possibly final – iteration of the perpetually ineffectual "peace process" are more fundamental.

The Likud Party charter flatly rejects the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state west of the Jordan River and stipulates that: "The Palestinians can run their lives freely in the framework of self-rule, but not as an independent and sovereign state." This Israeli government is committed to that charter as well as to the Jewish holy war for land in Palestine. It has no interest in trading land it covets for a peace that might thwart further territorial expansion. It considers itself unbound by the applicable UN resolutions, agreements from past peace talks, the "Roadmap," or the premise of the "two-state solution."

The Palestinians are desperate for the dignity and security that only the end of the Israeli occupation can provide. But the authority of Palestinian negotiators to negotiate rests on their recognition by Israel and the United States, not on their standing in the occupied territories, Gaza, or the Palestinian diaspora. Fatah is the ruling faction in part of Palestine. Its authority to govern was repudiated by voters in the last Palestinian elections. The Mahmoud Abbas administration retains power by grace of the Israeli occupation authorities and the United States, which prefer it to the government empowered by the Palestinian people at the polls. Mr. Abbas's constitutional term of office has long since expired. He presides over a parliament whose most influential members are locked up in Israeli jails. It is not clear for whom he, his faction, or his administration can now speak.

So the talks that begin tomorrow promise to be a case of the disinterested going through the motions of negotiating with the mandate-less. The parties to these talks seek to mollify an America that has severely lessened international credibility. The United States government had to borrow the modest reputations for objectivity of others – the EU, Russia, and the UN – to be able to convene this discussion. It will be held under the auspices of an American president who was publicly humiliated by Israel's prime minister on the issue that is at the center of the Israel-Palestine dispute – Israel's continuing seizure and colonization of Arab land.

Vague promises of a Palestinian state within a year now waft through the air. But the "peace process" has always sneered at deadlines, even much, much firmer ones. A more definitive promise of an independent Palestine within a year was made at Annapolis three years ago. Analogous promises of Palestinian self-determination have preceded or resulted from previous meetings over the decades, beginning with the Camp David accords of 1979. Many in this audience will recall the five-year deadline fixed at Oslo. The talks about talks that begin tomorrow can yield concrete results only if the international community is prepared this time to insist on the one-year deadline put forward for recognizing a Palestinian state. Even then there will be no peace unless long-neglected issues are addressed.

Peace is a pattern of stability acceptable to those with the capacity to disturb it by violence. It is almost impossible to impose. It cannot become a reality, still less be sustained, if those who must accept it are excluded from it. This reality directs our attention to who is not at this gathering in Washington and what must be done to remedy the problems these absences create.

Obviously, the party that won the democratically expressed mandate of the Palestinian people to represent them – Hamas – is not there. Yet there can be no peace without its buy-in. Egypt and Jordan have been invited as observers.

Yet they have nothing to add to the separate peace agreements each long ago made with Israel. (Both these agreements were explicitly premised on grudging Israeli undertakings to accept Palestinian self-determination. The Jewish state quickly finessed both.) Activists from the Jewish diaspora disproportionately staff the American delegation. A failure to reconcile either American Jews or the Palestine diaspora to peace would doom any accord. But the Palestinian diaspora will be represented in Washington only in tenuous theory, not in fact.

Other Arabs, including the Arab League and the author of its peace initiative, Saudi Arabia, will not be at the talks tomorrow. The reasons for this are both simple and complex. At one level they reflect both a conviction that this latest installment of the "peace process" is just another in a long series of public entertainments for the American electorate and also a lack of confidence in the authenticity of the Palestinian delegation. At another level, they result from the way the United States has defined the problems to be solved and the indifference to Arab interests and views this definition evidences. Then too, they reflect disconnects in political culture and negotiating style between Israelis, Arabs, and Americans.

To begin with, neither Israel nor the conveners of this proposed new "peace process" have officially acknowledged or responded to the Arab peace initiative of 2002. This offered normalization of relations with the Jewish state, should Israel make peace with the Palestinians. Instead, the United States and the Quartet have seemed to pocket the Arab offer, ignore its precondition that Israelis come to terms with Palestinians, and gone on to levy new demands.

In this connection, making Arab recognition of Israel's "right to exist" the central purpose of the "peace process" offends Arabs on many levels. In framing the issue this way, Israel and the United States appear to be asking for something well beyond pragmatic accommodation of the reality of a Jewish state in the Middle East. To the Arabs, Americans now seem to be insisting on Arab endorsement of the idea of the state of Israel, the means by which that state was established, and the manner in which it has comported itself. Must Arabs really embrace Zionism before Israel can cease expansion and accept peace?

Arabs and Muslims familiar with European history can accept that European anti-Semitism justified the establishment of a homeland for traumatized European Jews. But asking them even implicitly to agree that the forcible eviction of Palestinian Arabs was a morally appropriate means to this end is both a nonstarter and seriously off-putting. So is asking them to affirm that resistance to such displacement was and is sinful. Similarly, the Arabs see the demand that they recognize a Jewish state with no fixed borders as a clever attempt to extract their endorsement of Israel's unilateral expansion at Palestinian expense.

The lack of appeal in this approach has been compounded by a longstanding American habit of treating Arab concerns about Israel as a form of anti-Semitism and tuning them out. Instead of hearing out and addressing Arab views, U.S. peace processors have repeatedly focused on soliciting Arab acts of kindness toward Israel. They argue that gestures of acceptance can help Israelis overcome their Holocaust-inspired political neuroses and take risks for peace.

Each time this notion of Arab diplomacy as psychotherapy for Israelis has been trotted out, it has been met with incredulity. To most in the region, it encapsulates the contrast between Washington's sympathy and solicitude for Israelis and its condescendingly exploitative view of Arabs. Some see it as a barely disguised appeal for a policy of appeasement of Israel. Still others suspect an attempt to construct a "peace process" in which Arabs begin to supply Israel with gifts of carrots so that Americans can continue to avoid applying sticks to it.

The effort to encourage Arab generosity as an offset to American political pusillanimity vis-à-vis Israel is ludicrously unpersuasive. It has failed so many times that it should be obvious that it will not work. Yet it was a central element of George Mitchell's mandate for "peace process" diplomacy. And it appears to have resurfaced as part of the proposed follow-up to tomorrow's meeting between the parties in Washington. It should be no puzzle why the Saudis and other Arabs could not be persuaded to join this gathering.

As a last thought before turning to what must be done, let me make a quick comment on a relevant cultural factor. Arabic has two quite different words that are both translated as "negotiation," making a distinction that doesn't exist in either English or Hebrew. One word, "musaawama," refers to the no-holds-barred bargaining process that takes place in

bazaars between strangers who may never see each other again and who therefore feel no obligation not to scam each other. Another, "mufaawadhat," describes the dignified formal discussions about matters of honor and high principle that take place on a basis of mutual respect and equality between statesmen who seek a continuing relationship.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's travel to Jerusalem was a grand act of statesmanship to initiate a process of mufaawadhat – relationship-building between leaders and their polities. So was the Arab peace initiative of 2002. It called for a response in kind. The West muttered approvingly but did not act. After a while, Israel responded with intermittent, somewhat oblique suggestions of willingness to haggle over terms. But an offer to bicker over the terms on which a grand gesture has been granted is, not surprisingly, seen as insultingly unresponsive.

I cite this not to suggest that non-Arabs should adopt Arabic canons of thought, but to make a point about diplomatic effectiveness. To move a negotiating partner in a desired direction, one must understand how that partner understands things and help him to see a way forward that will bring him to an end he has been persuaded to want. One of the reasons we can't seem to move things as we desire in the Middle East is that we don't make much effort to understand how others reason and how they rank their interests. In the case of the Israel-Palestine conundrum, we Americans are long on empathy and expertise about Israel and very, very short on these for the various Arab parties. The essential militarism of U.S. policies in the Middle East adds to our difficulties. We have become skilled at killing Arabs. We have forgotten how to listen to them or persuade them.

I am not myself an "Arabist," but I am old enough to remember when there were more than a few such people in the American diplomatic service. These were officers who had devoted themselves to the cultivation of understanding and empathy with Arab leaders so as to be able to convince these leaders that it was in their own interest to do things we saw as in our interest. If we still have such people, we are hiding them well; we are certainly not applying their skills in our Middle East diplomacy.

This brings me to a few thoughts about the Western and Arab interests at stake in the Holy Land and their implications for what must be done.

In foreign affairs, interests are the measure of all things. My assumption is that Americans and Norwegians, indeed Europeans in general, share common interests that require peace in the Holy Land. To my mind, these interests include – but are, of course, not limited to – gaining security and acceptance for a democratic state of Israel; eliminating the gross injustices and daily humiliations that foster Arab terrorism against Israel and its foreign allies and supporters, as well as friendly Arab regimes; and reversing the global spread of religious strife and prejudice, including, very likely, a revival of anti-Semitism in the West if current trends are not arrested. None of these aspirations can be fulfilled without an end to the Israeli occupation and freedom for Palestinians.

Arab states, like Saudi Arabia, also have compelling reasons to want relief from occupation as well as self-determination for Palestinians. They may not be concerned to preserve Israel's democracy, as we are, but they share an urgent interest in ending the radicalization of their own populations, curbing the spread of Islamist terrorism, and eliminating the tensions with the West that the conflict in the Holy Land fuels. These are the concerns that have driven them to propose peace, as they very clearly did eight years ago. For related reasons, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has made inter-faith dialogue and the promotion of religious tolerance a main focus of his domestic and international policy.

As the custodian of two of Islam's three sacred places of pilgrimage – Mecca and Medina – Saudi Arabia has long transcended its own notorious religious narrow-mindedness to hold the holy places in its charge open to Muslims of all sects and persuasions. This experience, joined with Islamic piety, reinforces a Saudi insistence on the exemption of religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem from political interference or manipulation. The Ottoman Turks were careful to ensure freedom of access for worship to adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths when they administered the city. It is an interest that Jews, Christians, and Muslims share.

There is, in short, far greater congruity between Western and Arab interests affecting the Israel-Palestine dispute than is generally recognized. This can be the basis for creative diplomacy. The fact that this has not occurred reflects pathologies of political life in the United States that paralyze the American diplomatic imagination. Tomorrow's meeting

may well demonstrate that, the election of Barack Obama notwithstanding, the United States is still unfit to manage the achievement of peace between Israel and the Arabs. If so, it is in the American interest as well as everyone else's that others become the path-breakers, enlisting the United States as best they can in support of what they achieve, but not expecting America to overcome its incapacity to lead.

Here, I think, there is a lesson to be drawn from the Norwegian experience in the 1990s. The Clinton Administration was happy to organize the public relations for the Oslo accords but did not take ownership of them. It did little to protect them from subversion and overthrow, and nothing to insist on their implementation. Only a peace process that is protected from Israel's ability to manipulate American politics can succeed.

This brings me to how Europeans and Arabs might work together to realize the objectives both share with most Americans: establishing internationally recognized borders for Israel, securing freedom for the Palestinians, and ending the stimulus to terrorism in the region and beyond it that strife in the Holy Land entails. I have only four suggestions to present today. I expect that more ideas will emerge from the discussion period. A serious effort to cooperate with the Arabs of the sort that Norway is uniquely capable of contriving could lead to the development of still more options for joint or parallel action on behalf of peace.

Now to my suggestions, presented in ascending order of difficulty, from the least to the most controversial.

First, get behind the Arab peace initiative. Saudi Arab culture frowns on self-promotion and the Kingdom is less gifted than most at public diplomacy. Political factors inhibit official Arab access to the Israeli press. The Israeli media have published some – mostly dismissive – commentary on the Arab peace initiative but left most Israelis ignorant of its contents and unfamiliar with its text. Why not buy space in the Israeli media to give Israelis a chance to read the Arab League declaration and consider the opportunities it presents? I suspect the Saudis, as well as other members of the Arab League, would consider it constructive for an outside party to do this. It might facilitate other sorts of cooperation with them in which European capabilities can also compensate for Arab reticence. The Turks and other non-Arab Muslims should be brought in as full participants in any such efforts. This wouldn't be bad for Europe's relations with both. By the way, given the U.S. media's notorious one-sidedness and American ignorance about the Arab peace plan, a well-targeted advertising campaign in the United States might not be a bad idea either.

Second, help create a Palestinian partner for peace. There can be no peace with Israel unless there are officials who are empowered by the Palestinian people to negotiate and ratify it. Israel has worked hard to divide the Palestinians so as to consolidate its conquest of their homeland. Saudi Arabia has several times sought to create a Palestinian peace partner for Israel by bringing Fatah, Hamas, and other factions together. On each occasion, Israel, with U.S. support, has acted to preclude this. Active organization of non-American Western support for diplomacy aimed at restoring a unity government to the Palestinian Authority could make a big difference. The Obama Administration would be under strong domestic political pressure to join Israel in blocking a joint European-Arab effort to accomplish this. Under some circumstances, however, it might welcome being put to this test.

Third, reaffirm and enforce international law. The UN Security Council is charged with enforcing the rule of law internationally. In the case of the Middle East, however, the Council's position at the apex of the international system has served to erode and subvert the ideal of a rule-bound international order. Almost forty American vetoes have prevented the application to the Israeli occupying authorities of the Geneva Conventions, the Nuremberg precedents, human rights conventions, and relevant Security Council directives. American diplomacy on behalf of the Jewish state has silenced the collective voice of the international community as Israel has illegally colonized and annexed broad swaths of occupied territory, administered collective punishment to a captive people, assassinated their political leaders, massacred civilians, barred UN investigators, defied mandatory Security Council resolutions, and otherwise engaged in scofflaw behavior, usually with only the flimsiest of legally irrelevant excuses.

If ethnic cleansing, settlement activity, and the like are not just "unhelpful" but illegal, the international community should find a way to say so, even if the UN Security Council cannot. Otherwise, the most valuable legacy of Atlantic civilization – its vision of the rule of law – will be lost. When one side to a dispute is routinely exempted from principles, all exempt themselves, and the law of the jungle prevails. The international community needs collectively to affirm that

Israel, both as occupier and as regional military hegemon, is legally accountable internationally for its actions. If the UN General Assembly cannot "unite for peace" to do what an incapacitated Security Council cannot, member states should not shrink from working in conference outside the UN framework. All sides in the murder and mayhem in the Holy Land and beyond need to understand that they are not above the law. If this message is firmly delivered and enforced, there will be a better chance for peace.

Fourth, set a deadline linked to an ultimatum. Accept that the United States will frustrate any attempt by the UN Security Council to address the continuing impasse between Israel and the Palestinians. Organize a global conference outside the UN system to coordinate a decision to inform the parties to the dispute that if they cannot reach agreement in a year, one of two solutions will be imposed. Schedule a follow-up conference for a year later. The second conference would consider whether to recommend universal recognition of a Palestinian state in the area beyond Israel's 1967 borders or recognition of Israel's achievement of de jure as well as de facto sovereignty throughout Palestine (requiring Israel to grant all governed by it citizenship and equal rights at pain of international sanctions, boycott, and disinvestment). Either formula would force the parties to make a serious effort to strike a deal or to face the consequences of their recalcitrance. Either formula could be implemented directly by the states members of the international community. Admittedly, any serious deadline would provoke a political crisis in Israel and lead to diplomatic confrontation with the United States as well as Israel, despite the Obama Administration itself having proclaimed a one-year deadline in order to entice the Palestinians to tomorrow's talks. Yet both Israel and the United States would benefit immensely from peace with the Palestinians.

Time is running out. The two-state solution may already have been overtaken by Israeli land grabs and settlement activity. Another cycle of violence is likely in the offing. If so, it will not be local or regional, but global in its reach. Israel's actions are delegitimizing and isolating it even as they multiply the numbers of those in the region and beyond who are determined to destroy it. Palestinian suffering is a reproach to all humanity that posturing alone cannot begin to alleviate. It has become a cancer on the Islamic body politic. It is infecting every extremity of the globe with the rage against injustice that incites terrorism.

It is time to try new approaches. That is why the question of whether there is a basis for expanded diplomatic cooperation between Europeans and Arabs is such a timely one. And it is why I was pleased as well as honored to have been asked to set the stage for a discussion of this issue.