

**FROM MITCHELL TO ANNAPOLIS AND BEYOND:
THOUGHTS ON THE AMERICAN ROLE IN PALESTINIAN-
ISRAELI PEACEMAKING**

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Introduction

I'm deeply honored by your invitation to deliver a lecture this evening. Yet I'm sure that this very knowledgeable group needs no lecture from me. Indeed, "truth in advertising" requires me to state that I'm no expert in Palestinian-Israeli affairs. I am the CEO of a small international business consulting firm and it's a fulltime "day job." It is true that my exposure to the Middle East goes back nearly 44 years to the time I went to Damascus on an American Field Service exchange program. Yet I have never resided in a university or think tank - most of my professional life has been spent as an Army officer and business owner. Like many of you I struggle just to keep abreast of the daily news.

So, if it's a "lecture" you want, perhaps you've got the wrong guy. I have many more questions than answers and I've always preferred listening to speaking. I do, however, have some ideas I'd like to share. Many of them originate in a remarkable experience I had seven years ago as chief of staff of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, better known as the "Mitchell Committee" for its chairman, former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell.

Recently I've noticed that when people introduce me to strangers as having led the staff of the Mitchell Committee there is often a gasp of admiration. This is because some think I've been investigating steroid use in Major League Baseball. There is probably not a public house in America where I could not drink for free thanks to the mistaken impression that I have some connection to Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds. But this is not a tavern and this audience is not so easily fooled.

I spent much of my military career and have done a good deal of writing on Israel's relations with Syria and Lebanon. The non-baseball Mitchell Committee gave me a chance to dive directly into the Palestinian-Israeli track of the Arab-Israeli situation. This track is, quite obviously, the main event.

The experience was an eye-opener for me. What I think I learned was that effective American facilitation and mediation are absolutely essential. I came away from the experience firmly believing that the parties are incapable of making serious progress absent a central role for the US. I think I also learned that such a role would require intensive, on-the-ground, back-breaking labor. Moreover, without the personal, periodic intervention of the President of the United States, it makes no difference how hard people work or how brilliant the strategy might be.

The Mitchell Committee

The Fact-Finding Committee operated from November 2000 until May 2001. It was established by a summit meeting held in Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2000. Its mission was to find out why violence had broken out recently between Palestinians and Israelis and what needed to be done to prevent its recurrence. President Clinton recruited Senator Mitchell to head the effort. The other members of the committee were former Senator Warren Rudman, the Foreign Minister of Norway, the head of the European Union's foreign policy apparatus and a former President of Turkey. The staff was made up of Europeans, Turks and Americans. Beginning on January 1, 2001 the staff was headquartered in Jerusalem, where it operated through the end of March.

Some of you may remember that when Senators Mitchell and Rudman publicly unveiled the committee's report in May 2001 it was greeted with near universal acclaim. The report focused relentlessly on the two major concerns of the respective populations: the view of Israelis that Palestinians would never set aside violence and terror in

the pursuit of political objectives; and the view of Palestinians that Israelis would never voluntarily terminate the expanding occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Some two-dozen confidence-building recommendations were offered aimed at setting the stage for a near-term resumption of permanent status negotiations.

Editorial reaction around the world was very positive. The fact that we were publicly attacked only by extreme partisans on both sides reassured us that we'd gotten things approximately right. Secretary of State Colin Powell was carried live and a great length on CNN effusively praising the report. President Bush phoned Senator Mitchell, thanked him for the report and recommendations, and pointedly asked the architect of peace in Northern Ireland not to "retire" his "uniform." Yet there was in fact - as they say in Westerns - "trouble in Dodge."

The first sign of trouble was contained in the official, written responses to the report submitted by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Government of Israel. Both were unstinting in their praise of the fairness, balance and integrity of the effort. Yet it was painfully obvious from the respective statements that what each party truly liked were the findings and recommendations pertaining to the behavior of the other.

There was, for example, no statement from the PLO agreeing that terrorism - the deliberate, violent targeting of noncombatants for political purposes - is always and everywhere evil and inadmissible and that specific steps would be taken to counter it. Likewise, there was no statement from Israel acknowledging the corrosive effects of occupation and accepting that only a complete freeze of settlement activity could arrest a cancer killing the Oslo process. Indeed, in a letter to Secretary of State Powell dated 7 May 2001 Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres said, "Being one of the core issues to be dealt with in the future permanent status negotiations, settlements must not be prejudged as a reason for the outbreak of Palestinian violence."

The second sign of trouble was the absence of evidence of any American preparedness – much less planning – to help the parties implement the report’s confidence-building recommendations. In this regard allow me to make a few observations, none of which I think have ever been discussed publicly:

- First, Senator Mitchell made it clear to the committee staff that this report – addressed to the President of the United States – would not try to tell the administration what to do next. He believed that lecturing the president was beyond the committee’s charter. He was sensitive to the fact that he was a Democrat appointed by a Democratic president. He firmly concluded that he had neither the standing nor the inclination to lecture President Bush about how to do his job.
- Second, however, Senator Mitchell, Senator Rudman and yours truly were vitally interested in making sure that the report we wrote would not be “dead on arrival” when delivered to the administration. While directing the fact-finding committee’s field operations in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza I made sure that the incoming Deputy Secretary of State – a former business partner – was kept fully informed of what was going on. When our multinational staff spent much of April 2001 in Washington working on a report text initially drafted by me with major input (on settlements) from Senator Mitchell, my main objective – beyond making sure that the “facts” we “found” were described accurately and honestly – was to ensure that the White House would find our recommendations to be reasonable and implementable.
 - Sometimes this objective pitted me and my fellow American staffers against our colleagues. The Turkish representatives on the staff, for example, suggested a firm recommendation that Israel evacuate the Gaza Strip. Some of our European colleagues were favorably disposed toward an “international protection force” for the Palestinian territories. I resisted these suggestions out of the belief that they would cause the administration to

disown the effort and decline to help implement the confidence-building recommendations.

- I even went so far as to share a very late draft of the report with the Deputy Secretary of State and his key advisors in his office in April 2001. Neither he nor the advisors posed any objections whatsoever – on the contrary they found the report to be a potentially valuable diplomatic tool. They asked only that a few words inaccurately characterizing official American policy on a settlement freeze be modified. But awhile later when the report was finished I was asked by a State Department colleague to delay its delivery until after the forthcoming visit of Israel’s Foreign Minister. I declined to do so, but this was the first indication of administration nervousness notwithstanding all of the effort to produce something it would like.

- Third, during the time in-between my delivery of the final report to the State Department on April 30, 2001 and the report’s public release some three weeks later, Senator Mitchell spoke by telephone with Secretary Powell. Without being the least bit prescriptive, the Senator reminded the Secretary that the report would not implement itself; that timing, sequencing and monitoring of confidence-building recommendations were all-important; and that chronic distrust between the parties was such that nothing would happen without a strong American role guiding the process. The Secretary’s responses were, I’m told, cordial and positive. But they were also noncommittal and did not seek to elicit from the Senator any ideas on how to do it. A letter dated May 21, 2001 from Secretary Powell to Senator Mitchell contained several phrases which, in retrospect, signaled the administration’s reluctance to take the lead:
 - “We believe both sides should give serious consideration to the Committee’s recommendations and it is in this spirit that we endorse the report.”
 - “The United States is prepared to work with the international community to support the parties in their

efforts to create an environment for peace, but it cannot impose solutions on them. The decisions are theirs to make.”

- “With the publication of the final report, the Committee will have fulfilled its mandate, and thereby brought to an end its work. It is now the task of both parties to give serious consideration to the recommendations contained in the report.” In short, there was nothing in the Powell letter conveying either an explicit US endorsement of the recommendations or suggesting the administration’s readiness to consult with the parties immediately about their implementation.
- Fourth (and finally) I came quickly to the unhappy conclusion relatively soon after the report’s release that there had *never* been any intention on the part of the Bush administration to do *any* heavy lifting to help the parties implement the report’s recommendations.
 - I think that Secretary Powell’s green light to Senator Mitchell days after the inauguration of President Bush to continue and complete the committee’s work was deeply resented elsewhere in the administration. I think it may have been seen as confirming the fear of some that Powell would try to monopolize the administration’s foreign policy and therefore had to be countered and contained.
 - Indeed, in early 2001 Senator Mitchell had picked up reports that the Office of the Vice President had “problems” with the fact-finding committee. He asked me to check it out. The only person I really knew in that office was someone with whom I’d interacted in the Pentagon some 12 years earlier, a very conscientious and capable public servant named Scooter Libby. So I called Mr. Libby. When I explained my purpose he said, “My God Fred. You’re involved with *that*?” I replied, “Scooter, I’ve been involved with this since around Christmas and I think we’re doing some really good work that the administration will find very useful. What’s the problem?” Instead of spelling out the “problem” he

urged me to meet with a member of his staff. I did so within a day or two. The staffer had some concerns with things he was hearing about the committee's recommendations. I told him we were a long way from framing recommendations. I also told him that what he was hearing about the committee's lack of balance and objectivity was not accurate and that Senator Mitchell's track record in Northern Ireland ought to be weighed against the rumor mill. It was a cordial but unsettling conversation. With all of the effort I was making to keep the Deputy Secretary of State informed, how could the Office of the Vice President be so uninformed? Surely this all-star cast of foreign policy heavyweights advising the president was bound together in a functioning interagency system. Little did I or anyone else know at the time that this was far from the case.

- The implications of this disconnect became clear to me by May and June of 2001. The Department of State, which had the report in its hands by late morning on April 30th and knew essentially what was in it two weeks earlier, did no implementation planning whatsoever. In June 2001 (about a month after the report's public release) I received a call from someone in the Department asking me how I thought the confidence-building recommendations ought to be prioritized and sequenced. By the time George Tenet and General Tony Zinni were dispatched to the region to arrange cease fires it was too late. The wheels were off and seven wasted years set in motion.

Would the parties have cooperated if the administration had done its job? We'll never know. The terror bombing of a Tel Aviv disco in June 2001 may well have happened even if President Bush had appointed a special envoy and even if the State Department had done a plan. On the Israeli side sand was thrown in the gears by seizing upon words in the report calling for "a cooling off period" in order to argue - quite inaccurately but very effectively - that this meant there

would have to be a period of total peace and quiet before implementing any of the confidence-building recommendations, except of course for those recommendations requiring the Palestinian side to take action.

My personal belief is that a determined, disciplined American effort to help implement the fact-finding committee recommendations might have averted a disastrous worsening of the violence and might have helped put the parties on the path to renewed negotiations. But surely it would have required a special envoy enjoying full presidential backing. It would have required the special envoy's fulltime commitment and a sizeable American staff on the ground. It would have required banging heads together in order to produce a tightly choreographed timing and sequencing scheme: party A will do this by such and such a date and time; party B will immediately do this in response, upon which party A will do such and such. It would have been hard work and politically controversial with no guarantee of success. Indeed, with extremists on both sides determined to obstruct matters the prospect of success might have been 50-50 at best even if the requisite American effort had been made.

Still, I have no doubt that the political calculus in Washington that produced a hands-off policy was bad for American interests, worse for Israelis and the absolute worst for Palestinians. But in the pre-9/11 months of a new, narrowly elected administration the decision to let the work of the Mitchell Committee wither and die no doubt seemed sensible to the president and others. Indeed, I'm not even sure there was a decision. It was as if the administration thought that Senator George Mitchell had done its work for it by finding facts and writing a report. As Secretary Powell said in his thank you letter to Senator Mitchell, "Through its work, the Committee has made an important contribution to the parties in their efforts to find a pathway to peace. On behalf of President Bush and the United States, I thank the entire Committee and the Committee's staff for their extraordinary efforts in the cause of peace." Sadly, I can stand before you this evening and say, in all honesty, that the efforts were wasted.

The Annapolis Initiative

After 9/11, throughout the incumbency of Yasser Arafat and following the 2006 electoral triumph of Hamas, the administration employed *specific* justifications for policies and pronouncements that were essentially words only; initiatives that did not translate into actions beyond the speeches and press conferences where they were articulated.

The Quartet road map sought to recapture and repackage the positive, step-by-step approach of the Mitchell Report. Yet the hard work of timing, sequencing and monitoring was again left entirely to parties politically incapable of doing what needed to be done to convince the other side that political risk and painful compromise would actually be rewarded. The road map contained a political horizon absent in the Mitchell Report – one reflecting President Bush’s explicit endorsement of a Palestinian state. But its impact reminded one of Churchill’s famous description of Mussolini: “Big appetite, bad teeth.”

Again, there is no way to minimize (from an American perspective) the political risk, unpleasantness and sheer labor-intensive heavy lifting associated with mediation and facilitation in the Arab-Israeli context. Yet I have also encountered officials who reject such a central American role for reasons they say have nothing to do with political risk. I’ve been told by friends in the US Government that a vigorous, across-the-board American effort to monitor, mediate and facilitate would, even if successful, produce “inauthentic” results – that the parties themselves must want agreement badly enough to do virtually all of the heavy lifting without outside prodding, pressure and persuasion. I try hard not to be judgmental on these matters, but in my view this is diplomacy for the lazy; the ideology of the indolent. If we applied the same standard of “authenticity” to Iraq our forces would be out in record time. It is, after all, up to Iraqis to settle their political differences, is it not?

The violent events in Gaza last June helped to persuade Secretary Rice to organize a new peace initiative, one inaugurated in Annapolis last November. I for one applaud this initiative. Clearly President Bush wants it to work – I see no sign of him distancing himself from it as he did with the road map, permitting the parties for months on end to think and say that the road map was “only” the work of Colin Powell and Kofi Annan. I think that President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert sincerely wish to make progress. They have the same motive, and in the context of politics it is as pure as the driven snow: survival. And clearly the Secretary of State is investing the time and frequent flier miles appropriate to the task at hand.

When I say, therefore, that the Annapolis process is probably fatally flawed, please do not imagine that I am a chronic pessimist, or that I have a domestic political agenda or that I wish to denigrate the intentions or efforts of anyone.

When I look at the Annapolis framework what I see is a structure held up by two cross beams. To keep the structure upright these beams must be mutually reinforcing. If one gives way, so does the other and everything comes down.

One of the beams is a negotiating process aimed at producing an agreement on paper by year's end. The other is a process of implementing road map commitments beginning with the two key issues illuminated by the Mitchell Report: violence and settlements.

My proposition is simply this: unless we take Israeli and Palestinian negotiators out of Jerusalem and lock them up in Tierra del Fuego, Timbuktu or Tibet, they and their political masters will be affected – positively or negatively *but decisively* – by whatever happens on the ground. If violence persists, if settlements expand and if Israelis and Palestinians see no improvements that they can attribute to the positive actions of the other, how do we expect negotiators and their political masters to grasp third-rail issues such as refugees and Jerusalem and to resolve them successfully? And if there is no forward movement on the negotiating track, should we really expect

the parties to risk taking action in implementing road map obligations? Each beam, if you will, either supports and strengthens or weakens and ultimately brings down the other.

I know that many – if not most – Palestinians think that it's all a smoke screen anyway: that Israel has no real interest in mitigating the occupation and seeing a sustainable, sovereign and successful Palestinian state emerge. I know that many – if not most – Israelis think that Palestinians will never truly accept a Jewish state and will always pray for the day when they have an upper hand. I know from experience that each side points the finger at the other and says, in essence, "Prove to us you are serious by taking actions that redress our fundamental fears and grievances and do it because it is right, not because you will get something in return."

While I think I understand the views of those who ascribe to the other side the basest of motives and the worst of intentions and while I am neither blind or deaf to the evidence they cite, I am not convinced – far from it. I admit that I cannot divine the ultimate intentions of anyone. But what I can plainly see in this stalled, chicken-and-egg, Alphonse and Gaston peace process is politics 101.

I can see an Israeli Prime Minister who would like to keep his job. I can see him deciding not to confront Jewish settlers and not to deny building permits in occupied territory while explosives fall on Sderot. Indeed, I can see him declining to move against fellow Jews in even the most egregious of the outpost settlements so long as he cannot credibly cite – as Menachem Begin was able to do when he evacuated Yamit in 1982 – a worthy and trusted Arab beneficiary of the action. I can understand why a Palestinian Authority President – someone no less sensitive to the views of voters than his Israeli counterpart – might not wish to take actions or make gestures reassuring to Israelis while checkpoints choke his constituents and Israeli soldiers and pilots operate in environments that almost inevitably produce noncombatant deaths.

We fully recognized this debilitating dynamic during our Mitchell Committee deliberations. In our report we wrote, "The GOI and PA must act swiftly and decisively to halt the violence. Their immediate objectives then should be to rebuild confidence and resume negotiations. What we are asking for is not easy. Palestinians and Israelis – not just their leaders, but two publics at large – have lost confidence in one another. We are asking political leaders to do, for the sake of their people, the politically difficult: to lead without knowing how many will follow."

These were nice words. I wrote them. But I do not expect Ehud Olmert to lead without knowing how many would follow. I do not expect Mahmoud Abbas to organize a parade without marchers. We know of a handful of history's leaders so dedicated to a cause that they led for periods of time without looking back: Moses, Saint Paul, the Prophet Mohammed and Abraham Lincoln come to mind. We know about them because they succeeded against heavy odds. There were many others, no doubt, who were stabbed or shot in the back before they took the first step. So while it is easy to exhort others to act with selfless courage, heedless of doubters and critics, it is often if not always the emptiest of gestures.

So as we watch these Annapolis cross beams buckle and shake, perhaps we need to ask ourselves as Americans what *we* are doing to reinforce the structure. It is all well and good to tell others to set aside politics as usual. Yet it ill behooves the world's only superpower to lecture men and woman trying to stay upright in very rickety political systems about leadership and risk taking when we stay comfortably at arm's length, offering Dutch Uncle advice while implying it's really not, at the end of the day, our problem.

Yet it is our problem. Bringing an end to the Arab-Israeli dispute in all of its dimensions is a fundamental American national security interest. I think the Bush administration has finally accepted this view. Yet I am afraid that there are perceptual and procedural problems that, unless solved, will make it difficult for the

administration to bequeath to its successor an Annapolis process that is on track.

The Problem of Hamas

The obvious problem on which the world is focused is Gaza. There can be no substantial progress on road map implementation until the Israel-Gaza front is pacified. Pacification can be pursued principally through military means or mainly by negotiation. I prefer the latter because I believe the former to be unachievable at a cost acceptable to anyone.

The question I would pose is this: is it possible to explore a negotiated end to violence on the Gaza front so long as the US views Hamas entirely and exclusively through the optic of the Global War on Terrorism? If we define Hamas as the reverse side of the Al Qaeda coin - as part of a global problem involving violent forms of political Islam - instead of seeing it in its Palestinian-Israeli context, can we be part of the solution? Or have we inadvertently guaranteed that the Annapolis process will go nowhere? If Hamas cannot be beaten militarily at an acceptable price and if there is to be no effort to bring it into the Annapolis process, then what is there to do beyond watching one Annapolis beam drag down the other?

Please do not imagine that I assume Hamas wants in. Please do not assume that I presume Hamas can be brought in. Please do not put me down as a fan of Hamas ideology or as an apologist for the deliberate targeting of noncombatants - it is reprehensible at all times and under all circumstances. But you may certainly put me down as suggesting that Hamas be removed from the Global War on Terrorism context and put back where it belongs: in the Palestinian-Israeli context.

Once we place Hamas in the proper context we can do the proper diplomatic due diligence to see what might be possible. We could certainly support those in the Governments of Israel and Egypt who support seeking a sustainable cease fire, even though such a cease fire

would inevitably relax the economic blockade that has been in place since Hamas neutralized Fatah last summer. I see hints in the press that this might be under consideration. We could explore, perhaps with Saudi Arabia and Egypt taking the lead, what it would take for Hamas to join the rest of the Arab World in endorsing the Arab Peace Initiative. We could explore with Israel and the Palestinian side whether a Hamas endorsement of this vital initiative – combined with a willingness to stop violence and respect past agreements – might admit the organization to the Annapolis process as part of a restored Palestinian unity government.

Do I think a new context and new approach will work? I have no way of knowing. Do I think it should be tried? Do I think due diligence is justified? Well yes – this is what professionals do and I want Annapolis to work. Do I think President Bush would authorize and direct such a due diligence process? Certainly not if he is content simply to consign Hamas to the hell occupied by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and others with whom there is simply nothing to negotiate. While I would not call at this stage for direct American diplomatic contacts with Hamas – and obviously none of our presidential candidates will do so either – we have friends in the region quite capable of determining if this organization is interested in offering its constituents conflict without end or something more attractive. Regardless of what Hamas may choose I would not want our president to stand helplessly on the sideline watching the Annapolis structure implode simply because he equated this admittedly troublesome and bloody-minded organization with the cave dwellers of Waziristan or saw it as merely a pliant tool in the hands of Iran.

Absent the creation of an operational environment conducive to road map implementation and given an arm's length stance of the US, there can in my view be no substantial progress toward a negotiated agreement. There is not enough money in the world to rain down upon the head of Salam Fayyad to create this environment. No amount of urging, cajoling and arm-twisting by a Secretary of State can undo the physics of political gravity. When noncombatants are

killed in a Yeshiva, building permits in occupied territory will be issued to signal outrage and defiance for political purposes. When noncombatants are killed in the course of military operations in urban areas, negotiations will be suspended and harsh words spoken for political purposes. The fact that the purposes are political does not mean that they are artificial, illegitimate or cover-ups for deeper and darker purposes. Political leaders enjoy staying in office and they work hard to maintain majorities and preserve coalitions. If we decide not to share in the risk – if we can't help an Israeli prime minister take the heat or offer a Palestinian prime minister a real political horizon – then we shouldn't be surprised when Israeli and Palestinian politics as usual brings the Annapolis process down onto our heads.

Reinforcing the Annapolis Process

I sincerely hope that by January 2009 the Annapolis process will bequeath something useful for the new administration to work with. But I sincerely doubt this will be the case absent some near-term course correction.

Trying something different with Hamas – or more precisely authorizing others to do it – is essential. But the Annapolis process also needs reinforcement elsewhere.

I do not know Lieutenant General Fraser, the person charged with monitoring road map implementation. I assume he is a capable and perhaps brilliant officer. I believe, quite firmly, that road map implementation – even if restricted for the near-term to ameliorating security and economic conditions in the West Bank and Jerusalem – is a fulltime job requiring a fulltime, dedicated leader and staff with all hands on the ground and moving around. Likewise, the important strategic overview mission assigned to General Jones requires a fulltime, adequately staffed effort. One would have hoped, I think, that the important position of Quartet Representative assigned to Prime Minister Blair would have pursued as a fulltime endeavor with rigorous performance standards and accountability. I am at a loss,

quite frankly, to understand why these are all part-time jobs. They all involve issues of transcendent importance.

Many people whose judgment I trust on these issues – people of varying opinions and nationalities who follow these issues much more closely than my livelihood allows me to – tell me that the two-state solution is no longer operative. I hear from people not known for pessimism that populations are being radicalized to the point where even a single state scenario cannot be characterized as a solution.

I personally do not know whether the two state option is alive or dead. I see merit in analytical judgments that reach opposite conclusions on this question. What I believe as an American is that we must act as if the two state option is alive until it becomes crystal clear that it is dead. To bring it about, however, we need to involve ourselves much more seriously and diligently than we have heretofore.

I've shared with you my view of the Annapolis structure resting on two interdependent cross beams. As a practical matter and in light of the American interests engaged in this process I am not content, analytically, politically or emotionally, to see this structure collapse. But I suspect the Bush administration will not see merit in my recommended due diligence approach to Hamas. And even if it did, I am painfully aware that Hamas has a vote in this matter and it may choose for reasons of its own to follow a course designed to torpedo negotiations, defeat Fatah and prolong the agony. What then is to be done?

If the administration desires a written agreement to be produced by year's end in spite of ongoing conflict and chaos, I think serious consideration should be given to proceeding on the basis of an American text. Yes, this would mean that the parties would be negotiating with us as well as one another. Yes, this would mean that someone within the administration would have to organize and direct the drafting of an American text. Yes, this would mean debate,

dissent and disruption within the administration over words and even punctuation.

Yet surely even within the administration the notion has taken hold that the parameters and contours of the eventual two-state agreement are already fundamentally known - the problem is getting from here to there. From the Clinton Parameters, to Ayalon-Nusseiba to Geneva there is no shortage of ideas and language from which to draw. Admittedly this is a tricky proposition. One wants enough detail to get beyond a bland statement of agreed principles. But one also would want the parties to wrestle, albeit with our help, with practical details of implementation.

In urging the parties to reach an agreement by the end of 2008 the Bush administration is trying - quite commendably in my view - to commission for the benefit of two peoples a portrait of peace. Once the finished work is presented for all to see, presumably the remaining obstacles in terms of road map implementation could be better surmounted, enemies of peace could be marginalized and the parties would eventually implement the treaty itself.

The problem is getting there from here. If we want the parties to conduct a garden variety bilateral negotiation with the US perhaps helping with "bridging proposals" if and when asked, then there is absolutely no substitute for substantial simultaneous progress on roadmap implementation. Yet if we and the parties decide that suppressing violence, removing outposts, relaxing checkpoints and freezing settlement construction are all too hard to do, then getting to a written agreement covering all of the core issues by the end of this year *will not happen* unless the United States of America takes over the process lock, stock and barrel. Even then it might not happen if we insist on giving Hamas the veto or if Hamas exercises it in spite of all efforts to bring it inside the tent. But to pretend that the parties have the wherewithal to get it done in a conference room while all hell is breaking loose outside is to commission a Potemkin process and to drive a stake into the heart of the two-state option.

If in the end the current administration finds it distasteful to play a more central role in these proceedings, I certainly hope that the next president – Democrat or Republican – will try something different. Given that it takes time for an incoming administration to find its “sea legs” on matters of foreign policy, one approach might be to commission someone with the prestige of a George Mitchell to undertake 60 or 90 days of intensive consultations with the parties and a wide range of experts and produce an agreement text that would form the basis of the US Government view of what a sustainable two-state solution would look like. If acceptable to the new president, this text would be the basis of concentrated American mediation starting perhaps this time next year.

I am aware of the political risks and unpleasantness associated with American diplomatic activism in the Arab-Israeli context. I am aware that American presidents have other policy priorities and objectives, both foreign and domestic. But make no mistake: without a comprehensive diplomatic strategy featuring a central American role involving the power and prestige of the presidency, we are choosing a one-state outcome; we are saying “No” to the prospects of a Jewish democracy and “No” to the birth of a sovereign Palestinian state. I hope this will not be our choice. I hope that the next administration will agree with the conclusion the Bush administration took nearly seven years to reach: that the influence and prestige of the United States will not be fully restored in the Middle East unless and until this dispute is either settled or at least seen by virtually all as being on the irreversible course to settlement.

One final observation: I’ve already taken up too much of your evening commenting on a peace process about which I admitted, at the outset, I am no expert. Yet since I’ve gone this far, let me conclude with a few words about the current state of politics on the Palestinian side of the equation.

Ever since my Mitchell Committee experience I have been a believer in the proposition that Palestine is very likely to be the first real democracy in the Arab world. I honestly still believe this to be the

case. Even under conditions of occupation Palestinians have been able to conduct respectable elections. Perhaps I've just been fortunate in my associations, but the Palestinians I have known over the years have had little appetite for authoritarianism in any of its forms.

Yet Palestinian democracy depends ultimately on independence, which in turn depends in large measure on the emergence of a legitimate, empowered governing authority even under conditions of occupation. Someone, after all, must negotiate authoritatively and take responsibility for implementing the terms of an eventual treaty of peace. If the goal is a state encompassing the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, there must be a single, legitimate authority empowered to negotiate for its existence.

Recently I attended a conference at which many of these issues were discussed. During the proceedings I was approached by a member of Fatah who I've known and respected for some time. He urged me to suggest to Israelis that they have no contact whatsoever with Hamas; that Hamas needed simply to be crushed militarily.

Now I have no doubt that there are hard feelings of deep bitterness dating back to June 2007 and even earlier. Moreover, I am no defender of the behavior or ideology of Hamas – no more than I can defend the corruption and incompetence that opened the door to Hamas' electoral victory in the first place. What I sensed, however, when I listened to my friend at the conference, is that this division bodes well for no one. I have no knowledge, indirect or otherwise, of the external machinations that reportedly may have helped to stimulate the violent events of last spring. If the reports are true, they reflect considerable bad judgment on the parts of the perpetrators. For Palestinians, however, the challenge is to use every best effort to heal this breach and to create a unified, legitimate authority capable of negotiating, implementing and ultimately governing a state on the basis of the consent of the governed. To fail in this regard is to acknowledge, at long last, the reality of an entire people's utter defeat.

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak. I hope this has not been a lecture, at least in the most formal sense of the word. I hope I have not overly tried your patience. I thank you for listening and would be happy to try to answer any questions you might have.