

To end the bloodshed: Why the "Peace Process" Broke Down

by [Rashid I Khalidi](#) in the [November 22, 2000](#) issue

According to the consensus among American commentators, reflecting the views of the administration and Congress, a peace process that was on the verge of a breakthrough a few months ago has broken down because of the Palestinians' intransigence. Instead of responding to a generous Israeli offer, they have turned to senseless violence, putting Israel under siege and bringing calamity on themselves.

No part of this oft-repeated formula corresponds to the reality on the ground.

A "peace process" of nine years has produced only negative results for the Palestinians, as is evident from a glance at the map, which shows dozens of Palestinian-controlled islands comprising less than 18 percent of the West Bank and about 60 percent of the Gaza Strip surrounded by a vast sea of continuing Israeli occupation. In terms of virtually every index, whether per capita income, freedom of movement or otherwise, the lives of ordinary Palestinians have gotten worse since the current "peace process" began in 1991.

Israel has violated every one of the seven agreements it signed with the PLO since 1993. It failed to halt settlement expansion and the seizure of Palestinian land and the building of Israeli-only "bypass roads." It failed to release Palestinian prisoners, establish safe passages between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, open a seaport at Gaza, or to carry out a third withdrawal by May 1999, as agreed, from the entirety of the occupied territories except the settlements, military bases and specific access routes. The violence which has broken out has been a natural response of a people desiring its independence from this continued occupation, which involves an Israeli siege of Palestinian cities and towns, not vice versa as is so often claimed by the media.

Moreover, Israel's offer at Camp David was by no means generous. It would have led to Israel's permanent annexation of 8 to 12 percent of the West Bank as well as a large area of settlements around Jerusalem, plus the long-term "lease" to Israel of

the Jordan River Valley, plus Israeli “security control” (which is another way of saying “continued occupation”) of the vast swathes of territory on which lie the bypass roads connecting the settlements. An Israeli military and settlement overlay would thus have continued to dominate a quilt of Palestinian Bantustans.

As for Jerusalem, Barak’s “generous offer” gave Israel sovereignty and full control over its illegally built settlements in about 40 percent of East Jerusalem, plus the Jewish and Armenian quarters of the Old City, the Mount of Olives, the Palestinian Silwan district and the Haram al-Sharif precinct, all of which would have remained under Israel security control.

Israel would have admitted no responsibility for the expulsion of the Palestinian refugees in 1948, would have accepted the “family reunification” of only 10,000 per year for a decade (out of a total of over 3 million), and would not have paid compensation to them.

The way in which this offer was made was as unfair as its contents: after Israel refused to negotiate seriously on these or any of the other complex “permanent status” issues for nine years, Ehud Barak presented a take-it-or-leave-it offer at Camp David. When the Palestinians balked, President Clinton took the same basic offer and presented it as an American proposal, also on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

Although the Palestinian Authority did not respond immediately to these proposals (as it probably should have), it continued trying to negotiate, postponing a planned Palestinian unilateral declaration of independence in September, and attempting to find a formula whereby real give-and-take could take place over these issues. It repeatedly discussed with Egypt, the U.S. and Israel compromise proposals for dealing with the issue of sovereignty in Jerusalem.

When the inevitable explosion came, touched off by Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit to the Haram, the Palestinian Authority was just as surprised as anyone else. Israeli claims that the PA planned and launched the uprising are ludicrous. The PA has in fact been completely left behind by the Palestinian people, who seem determined no longer to tolerate endless and pointless negotiations with a party which has demonstrated its utter disregard for signed agreements while the settlement-building, land confiscation and building of bypass roads continue unchecked.

What were the real reasons for the failure of the “peace process”?

- It went on for too long and achieved too little: after nine years and seven agreements, 82 percent of the West Bank is still under Israeli occupation, while 1.4 million Palestinians are denied access to nearly 40 percent of the Gaza Strip, where Israeli troops protect the luxurious lifestyle of 6,000 settlers.
- Israel has never shown willingness to confront the settlers' movement, evacuate settlements and end the occupation, and with it the stifling system of control of the life of ordinary Palestinians. The contrary has happened: Palestinians are even worse off than before Oslo, not one settlement has been dismantled, tens of thousands more acres of Palestinian land have been seized, and nearly 80,000 more Israelis live on that land than was the case in 1991.
- Arafat and the PA, whose popularity has been declining since 1995, have been further discredited, having failed to obtain self-determination and independence, or to end Israeli settlement and land seizure, while imprisoning Palestinians for attacking Israel, as part of a one-sided bargain which Israel has never respected.
- The U.S has played a disgraceful role throughout, failing to serve as an honest broker. It has consulted with Israel before every step in the negotiations, pressuring the Palestinians shamelessly and ignoring the land-for-peace formula which was supposed to be the basis of the process, while freezing out any other potential mediators.

The Madrid-Oslo process has come to an end. A new one must provide a balanced and fair framework for negotiation (probably with Israel and the U.S. on the same side of the table and a real mediator in the middle), based firmly on international law and UN resolutions. The process must have ironclad deadlines and fixed objectives: a rapid and phased end to occupation, the complete removal of settlements, Palestinian self-determination and statehood with Jerusalem as a capital for both Palestine and Israel, and a real security framework for all nations of the region.

Such new terms may seem unrealistic, given the nonsensical consensus in the press and in Washington, and will be hard for the Israelis to accept. But they are unlikely to find Palestinian or Arab interlocutors for anything less, and it is only through negotiations that this problem can finally be solved. In fact, anything other than a formula along these lines is unrealistic—and a recipe for more bloodshed.