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# No Way to Make Peace

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In March 1990, after months of delicate negotiations, the State Department was near to setting up the first-ever direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians in Cairo. At which point, out of the blue, President Bush raised the issue of Jewish "settlement" of Jerusalem. This gratuitous undermining of Israel's claim to Jerusalem helped precipitate a crisis in Israel. (Not even the most moderate Israeli is prepared to make any part of Jerusalem off-limits to Jews.) The Israeli government collapsed, and the Cairo talks never took place.

Eighteen months later, Bush has done it again. After months of delicate negotiations, the State Department was near to setting up direct talks between Israel and the Arab states. At which point, out of the blue, President Bush announced that he would veto any congressional attempt to guarantee loans to Israel for the absorption of Soviet immigrants. The president demanded a 120-day delay for consideration of the loans out of concern for the peace process. Granting the guarantees now, he said, would jeopardize the upcoming peace conference. This is nonsense. Not a single Arab state—not Syria, not Egypt, not Jordan—has made withholding the loan guarantee a condition for participation in the conference. Nor has a single Arab state made an Israeli settlement freeze a condition for attending the peace conference. On the con-

trary: Secretary Baker's major breakthrough was obtaining Arab agreement to enter talks with Israel unconditionally. What possible reason can an American president have to create new conditions no Arab insists on?

Of course, now that Bush has been more Catholic than the pope, it will be difficult for any Arab not to be as tough on Israel as the president of the United States. Predictably, two days after the president's pressroom outburst against Israel, Syria, which two months ago had agreed to direct talks without preconditions, picked up the hint and warned that the loan guarantees would doom the chances for peace. Far from saving the peace process, Bush's linkage between American loan guarantees and Arab-Israeli negotiations could wreck it.

Bush's real reason for withholding the loan guarantees is to use them as a club to force Israel to stop West Bank settlements. Settlements have become a presidential obsession. At a time when the Soviet Union is collapsing, Saddam is recovering and the American economy is sputtering, the one thing that seems to stir the passions of this president is the number of Jews living on the godforsaken hills of the Judean desert. (A small number indeed: If Israel continues to settle the occupied territories at the rate of the last 25 years, their Jewish population will equal the current Arab population in 412 years.)

Bush's obsession is not just irrational. It leads him to policies that are deeply contrary to the American national interest. America's interest—and Bush's goal for the area—is Arab-Israeli peace. How does one get to it? We already know. The only way to get peace is the way Egypt and Israel did: Egypt made a genuine, indeed radical, offer of peace; Israel reciprocated with a radical offer on territory.

True, a majority of Israelis are not prepared to cede territory on the West Bank. But remember: For years a majority of Israelis opposed giving back Sinai to Egypt. But when Sadat came forward and offered real peace, it caused a revolution in Israeli public opinion on the issue. Similarly, if the Arabs came forward with a genuine, Sadat-like offer of peace, it would cause a revolution in Israeli public opinion about the West Bank and permit far-reaching Israeli compromise.

That is the only road to peace. It will not be traveled, however, so long as the Arabs think they can get the West Bank back for free. If Bush is going to deliver it to them by pressuring Israel, what possible incentive do they have to make a far-reaching peace offer to Israel? And in the absence of such an offer, no Israeli in his right mind is going to jeopardize Israel's existence with unilateral concessions on the West Bank—no matter what the pressure from Washington.

The Arabs know that there are only two ways to get what they want from Israel. One is to deal with Israel directly and offer peace. The other is to let Uncle Sam do it. It is natural for the Arabs to prefer Route 2. But it is Route 1 that serves American interests. Why? Because it is the only one that leads to peace.

How do we know? The historical evidence is unmistakable. Israel has twice given Sinai back to Egypt. One return led to war, the other to peace. The first time was 1957, when Eisenhower pressured Israel into withdrawing from Sinai in return for vague guarantees from the United States. Egypt offered nothing, Israel complied, and 10 years later, Egypt, having made no concession toward accepting Israel's existence, used Sinai to blockade Israel and started the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

In 1979 the United States did it differently. This time Egypt made a genuine offer of peace to Israel. Israel reciprocated by returning all of Sinai. The United States acted as broker, not as an agent for Arab demands. It is 12 years later, and Egypt and Israel are at peace.

The rules of peacemaking in the Middle East are clear. If the Arabs want to wring from Israel concessions on the territories, they must offer an end to their 45-year-old war on the Jewish state. So long as Bush does the wringing, why should they?