

Challenging the Myths about the Failure of the 2000 Camp David Talks

- 1 Both the Clinton and Bush administrations, along with leading members of Congress of both parties, have deliberately misrepresented what happened in the peace process before, during, and after Camp David, as well as what has transpired since the outbreak of the second intifada in late September 2000. This has served to justify a policy of supporting an increasingly repressive occupation army, something that would otherwise be unpalatable to the American public.
- 2 The Palestinians bear some major responsibility for the tragic turn of events following the unsuccessful end of the talks hosted by President Clinton. However, a careful examination of the events appears to indicate that the primary fault for the failure of the peace process and the subsequent violence lies squarely with the occupying power—Israel—and its patron—the United States.
- 3 Throughout the peace process, the Clinton administration seemed to coordinate the pace and agenda of the talks closely with Israel, ignoring Palestinian concerns.
- 4 The U.S. insistence to jump to final-status negotiations without prior confidence building measures—such as a freeze on new settlements or the fulfillment of previous Israeli pledges to withdraw—led the Palestinians to question the sincerity of both Israel and the United States.
- 5 Claims that Barak offered 95% of the West Bank to the Palestinians at the Camp David summit are misleading. This figure does not include greater East Jerusalem, which includes Palestinian villages and rural areas to the north and east of the city unilaterally annexed by Israel. Nor does this figure include much of the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea coast and parts of the Judean Desert, which would have remained under exclusive Israeli military control for an indefinite period. Taking these additional areas into account, this offer totaled only slightly more than 80% of the West Bank, forcing the Palestinians to relinquish land needed for their development and absorption of refugees.
- 6 Also under Barak's U.S.-backed plan, the West Bank would have been split up by a series of settlement blocs, bypass roads and Israeli roadblocks, by some interpretations dividing the new Palestinian "state" into four non-contiguous cantons. In addition, Israel would have supervision of border crossing between the new Palestinian state and neighboring Arab states. Israel would also control Palestinian airspace, seacoast and aquifers.
- 7 Although Barak's offers did go further than any previous Israeli government, they fell well short of what Israel was required to do under basic international legal standards—such as the Fourth Geneva Convention—and a series of UN Security Council resolutions. These include the departure from the Jewish settlements, rescinding the annexation of greater East Jerusalem and withdrawal from territories seized in the 1967 war in return for security guarantees.
- 8 Clinton naively thought that he could pressure Arafat to accept Israeli terms, even though negotiations up to that time indicated that the two sides were still far apart on some key issues. Even if Clinton had been successful in forcing Arafat to agree to Israeli terms, there simply would not have been enough support among the Palestinian population to make it a viable agreement.
- 9 The Palestinian uprising in late September was a spontaneous eruption exacerbated by

excessive use of force by Israeli occupation troops. There is no evidence that Arafat or anyone else the Palestinian Authority planned it.

10 Clinton's peace plan in December improved Israel's July proposal only slightly and was initially rejected by the Palestinians. However, Israeli-Palestinian talks in Taba the following month, without active U.S. participation, led to major concessions by both sides and came within striking dis-

tance of a peace agreement. The Israelis balked at the last minute, however, soon followed by Barak's electoral defeat.

11 The bipartisan consensus in the U.S. is that the fate of the Palestinians is up to their Israeli occupiers. Statements by both the Clinton and Bush administrations and congressional resolutions passed by huge bipartisan majorities have made it clear that Washington conditions Palestinian independence to Israeli terms.

(See new FPIF Special Report: The U.S. Role in the Breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, written by Stephen Zunes <stephen@coho.org>. Zunes is the Middle East editor for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at www.fpif.org), and an associate professor of politics and chair of the peace & justice studies program at the University of San Francisco.)