



# A Guide To Arab-Israeli Diplomacy

## USIP's Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East

Finding a truly balanced resource on the Arab-Israeli issue is never easy but we came across an incredible volume from a bi-partisan commission of experts from the United States Institute of Peace and wanted to make this resource accessible to you on campus. Enjoy this abridged version!

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**Kurtzer, Daniel C., and Scott B. Lasensky.**  
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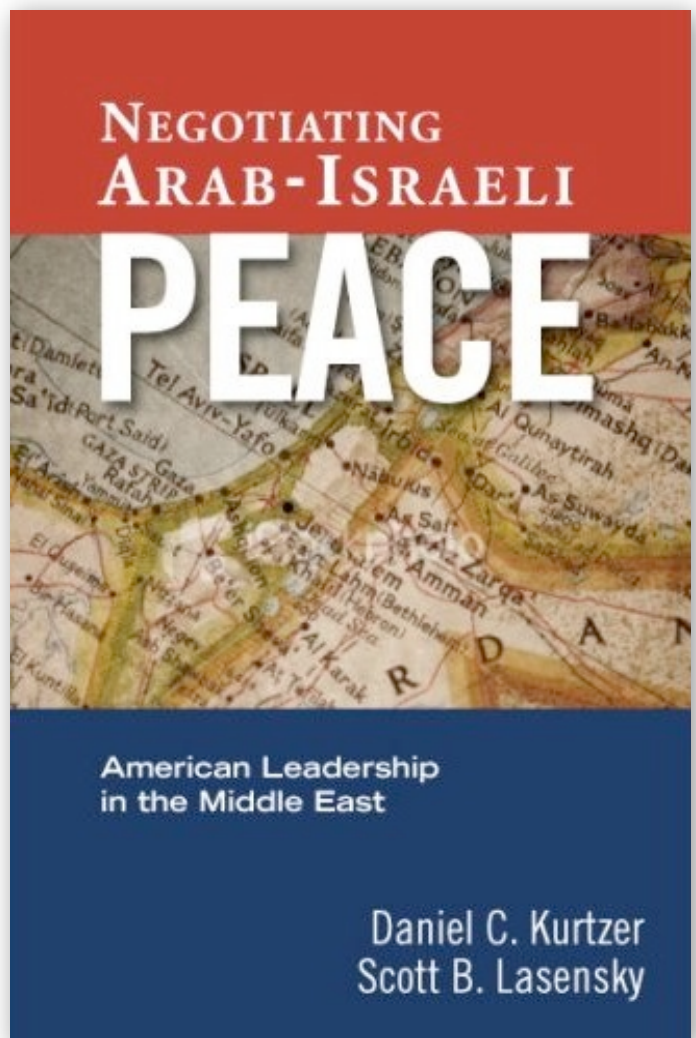
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*"This concise volume is the product of the United States Institute of Peace's Study Group on Arab-Israeli Peacemaking, which brings together some of America's most respected and experienced authorities in the field, including William B. Quandt, Steven L. Spiegel, and Shibley I. Telhami. The book draws on months of groundbreaking consultations with over one hundred statesmen, political leaders, and civil society figures who have defined Middle East peacemaking in our times."*

*(Back Cover)*

*". . . a well-reasoned, realistic study setting out what works and what does not in this distinctive diplomatic arena. Today's leadership (and tomorrow's) could usefully build on the lessons presented here."*

*-Foreign Affairs*



## **Ten Lessons to Guide Arab-Israeli Peacemaking**

***Lesson 1. Arab-Israeli peacemaking is in our national interest: September 11, Iraq, and increasing instability in the Middle East have made U.S. leadership in the peace process more, not less, important. The president needs to indicate that the peace process is a priority and ensure that the administration acts accordingly.***

“The United States has the power and the influence to stem the conflict’s further deterioration, preserve the viability of endgame solutions, and explore whether openings for negotiations are possible. However, it requires strong and sustained commitment from the next president’s administration. The president must demonstrate, in words and deeds, that the peace process is an important part of the administration’s agenda and will remain so throughout his or her term in office.” (Pages 26-29)

***Lesson 2. U.S. policy must never be defined anywhere but in Washington. Consultations with the parties must take place and policy revisions based on those consultations are inevitable, but U.S. policy must be seen as our own.***

“The United States can and should support leaders who take risks for peace using diplomatic, economic, or security assurances, but we should also be careful not to grant too much influence to any party’s domestic concerns. Bush 41 devoted too little attention to domestic politics in the region. Clinton devoted too much, often allowing Israeli domestic politics effectively to veto critical issues, most notably the question of settlements. The Bush 43 administration also proved overly deferential to the stated political problems of the Israeli government while tending to turn a blind eye toward domestic constraints on the Arab side.” (Pages 30-34)

***Lesson 3. The United States must not only exploit openings, but also actively encourage, seek out, and create opportunities for peacemaking.***

“Following a pattern first established by Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who generated diplomatic openings in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Bush 41 and Baker seized on international and regional strategic shifts to move the parties actively toward a defined objective. Out of the crisis created by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, the United States created an opportunity for peacemaking and successfully launched the Madrid peace process. Critically, Washington was active in seeking out opportunities rather than waiting for ideal conditions to present themselves.” (Pages 34-35)

***Lesson 4. The peace process has moved beyond incrementalism and must aim for endgame solutions. This not only requires U.S. leadership to help the parties make the necessary trade-offs on core issues, but also a commitment to an expanded diplomatic approach that involves key international and regional actors.***

“The failure of the Oslo process and the demise of the Roadmap signal the end of incrementalism, the step-by-step diplomacy in Arab-Israeli negotiations by which the parties tried to negotiate interim agreements that would build confidence and momentum toward resolving the more difficult final settlement issues. As far back as the late 1970s, interim agreements, have, by and large, not succeeded, and their failure has increased mistrust rather than built confidence. On both the Syrian and Palestinian tracks, the broad outlines of viable negotiated settlements are well known to all sides, and thus, the next president should eschew incrementalism and interim agreements in favor of an approach that concentrates the minds of the parties on the concessions necessary to end the conflict.” (Page 39)

***Lesson 5. Commitments made by the parties and agreements entered into must be respected and implemented. The United States must ensure compliance through monitoring, setting standards of***

***accountability, reporting violations fairly to the parties, and exacting consequences when commitments are broken or agreements not implemented.***

“The diplomatic process itself should not be valued over results, which remain the ultimate indicator or progress toward peace. From the Bush 41 administration to the present, the United States failed to monitor performance and enforce commitments the parties made to each other and to Washington; this failure was highlighted more than any other issue throughout the study group’s consultations. Former policy makers widely acknowledged that the lack of accountability was corrosive, eroding confidence among the parties, undermining U.S. standing, and allowing destructive developments to proceed unchecked.” (Page 43)

***Lesson 6. The direct intervention of the president is vital, but presidential assets are finite and should be used selectively and carefully. Too direct a role runs the risk of devaluing the power of the office. Too modest a role runs the other risk of failing to capitalize on diplomatic openings.***

“Part of the price of reaching the Wye accord was the promise of a first-ever presidential visit to the Palestinian areas as well as Israel, which Clinton deftly used to coax and prod both sides to adhere to Wye. The visit itself was used judiciously and focused on keeping Wye and the larger process on track.” (Pages 47-48)

***Lesson 7. Build a diverse and experienced negotiating team steeped in regional and functional expertise; encourage open debate and collaboration within the government. A dysfunctional policy process should not be tolerated.***

“U.S. policymakers repeatedly stressed to the study group six elements of organizational success: clear lines of authority; a disciplined, diverse, and experienced team; debate; deliberation; information sharing; and proper policy planning and preparation. For much of the period under review, however, many of these elements were lacking. Bush 41, under the policy management of Secretary Baker, incorporated most of the above elements. Baker assembled a diverse and experienced team that combined functional expertise with in-depth knowledge of Arabs and Israelis. U.S. ambassadors were integral members of his team and were used to maintain communications with key regional leaders, report and analyze events, and close gaps of perception or understanding in cross-cultural negotiations. Debate was encouraged and confidentiality maintained. Intensive preparation went into every aspect of negotiations, including Baker’s eight shuttle missions between March and October 1991. Careful records were kept and the decision-making process was documented in an orderly manner.” (Pages 51-52)

***Lesson 8. Build broad and bipartisan domestic support and use political capital before it is too late in a presidential term. Keep Congress well informed. Cultivate close relations on Capitol Hill and with advocacy communities without being held captive to the agendas of domestic groups.***

“As with any high-profile policy, foreign or domestic, successful Arab-Israeli peacemaking requires a strong bipartisan coalition, with support from interest groups and Congress ... Clinton amassed substantial political capital at home. At times, he used it effectively, as with Netanyahu’s failure to move forward with the Interim Agreement and later with his failure to comply on the Wye River accord ... Bush 43 may have accumulated even more domestic political capital toward Israel, but he failed to use it. In March 2002, Bush 43 demanded publicly that Israel pull back from Palestinian cities it had reoccupied, but then dropped the demand and soon after called Sharon a “man of peace.” Later, in 2004 and 2005, Bush allowed Sharon to dictate the scope of the Gaza disengagement, failing to draw a strong enough connection to the West Bank to withstand charges that disengagement was little more than Israel’s ridding itself of the burden of Gaza.” (Pages 55-58)

***Lesson 9. A successful envoy needs the strong and unambiguous support of the White House, credibility with all parties, and a broad mandate. Envoys should not substitute for meaningful diplomacy. Better a policy without an envoy than an envoy without a policy.***

“If a serious monitoring effort is to be undertaken, an envoy should lead it, even if it requires extended stays in the region. The lack of a strong envoy based in the region and with a broad mandate was a major hindrance to transforming Israeli disengagement into a positive and stabilizing force.” (Page 60)

**“White House Blessing.** Whatever his standing among other negotiators, as Clinton’s envoy, [Dennis] Ross clearly had administration support at almost every stage of his long tenure at the helm of U.S. peacemaking efforts. This support was an important source of strength for his mediation. The parties perceived Ross as having what one former cabinet official described as walk-in rights to the Oval Office” (Page 62)

**“Expertise and Political Clout.** Envoys do not need to be steeped in the intricacies of Arab-Israeli relations and carry political clout at the same time, but they do need to score high in at least one category. Arabs and Israelis have become accustomed to dealing with either high-profile interlocutors or highly experienced ones. Zinni compensated for lack of specific experience in the Arab-Israeli conflict with broad experience in the Arab world and his weight as a senior, well-respected military figure. George Mitchell compensated for his relative lack of experience by bringing a substantial amount of stature to the process.” (Pages 62-63)

**“Full Menu.** Successful Arab-Israeli peacemaking requires that an envoy be given a broad mandate that covers a range of key issues, including political, economic, and security matters. Under the Bush 43 administration, there was a tendency to divide portfolios and empower functional envoys ... The Bush 43 pattern of dividing the traditional envoy into discrete, functional roles has not proven very successful; it has put our envoys in a position of mediating with one hand – sometimes both hands – tied behind their backs.” (Page 64)

**“Symbols Matter.** In Arab-Israeli peacemaking, as with most diplomatic missions, symbols can easily become substance. Each party is sensitive to the time and attention it receives from the mediator, often correlating it with trust ... Arriving – whether by plane or car – and then departing in the course of a few hours, as was the case when visiting with Arab leaders, sends the wrong signal. A constant presence in the region can be accomplished without creating unneeded impressions of favoritism.” (Page 64)

**Lesson 10. Use the diplomatic toolbox judiciously and pay close attention to developments on the ground. Tools such as economic assistance and summitry should be used with strategic objectives in mind, not merely to buy time.**

“As this book emphasizes throughout, good policy starts with strong and focused leadership – a president willing and able to define priorities, organize an active diplomatic effort, and encourage follow-through with experienced and expert staff. The creative diplomacy called for in this study requires the judicious use of both carrots and sticks in our foreign policy toolbox. U.S. economic and security assistance has been of crucial importance at key junctures in the peace process. Since the late 1970s, the United States had provided billions of dollars of aid to Israel and Egypt, not only as a reward for making peace but also to assure that Israel has the support it needs to take prudent risks in peace process diplomacy. U.S. diplomats have used other tools, such as international conferences, summitry, shuttle diplomacy, security guarantees, side letters, and written assurances, and threats and other punitive measures, as the need has arisen.” (Page 65)

**“Nontraditional Diplomacy.** Keeping abreast of developments and identifying emerging trends, within Israel, the Palestinian areas, and Arab societies more broadly, also requires investing in nontraditional diplomacy ... At both the elite (track II dialogue) and popular (people-to-people) levels, nontraditional diplomacy humanizes the contending parties ... Not all such efforts need remain discreet. Certain initiatives, such as the Ayalon-Nusseibeh principles, can help to sustain and build popular support for peacemaking ... “The only way peace will happen,” a civil-society leader told the study group, “is if there’s both top-down and bottom-up peace.” U.S. negotiators and policy professionals, including those who direct our economic assistance programs, should pay closer attention to the bottom-up sector.”(Pages 66-67)

**“Foreign Aid and Economic Incentives.** With few exceptions, such as the post-Wye assistance and free trade with and economic aid for Jordan, the net impact of our economic assistance too often has been to subsidize the status quo ... International assistance to Palestinians more than doubled in the years after the collapse of Oslo, due to both humanitarian concerns and the interest of donors in preserving the PA as a future negotiating partner. But the effect of this increase seemed negligible ... As economic aid assistance and trade incentives with Jordan reach record levels and aid to Egypt remains high, future administrations must ensure that these inducements not only sustain Arab-Israeli peace but also support the reform and development agenda that remains vital for long-term stability in the region.” (Pages 67-68)

**“Summitry.** International conferences have long been a feature of the Arab Israeli diplomatic landscape as an effective tool for jump-starting negotiations and leveraging the combined influence of other outside parties. The United States has traditionally viewed conferences not as the goal of the peace process, but as a means to bring the parties together with outside support and thereby inject momentum for serious negotiations ... Still, summitry more recently [since the Madrid Conference in 1991] has been misused. Rather than calling a summit in the context of a negotiation reasonably well prepared for at lower levels, recent administrations called for high-stakes meetings before the parties were ready to reach agreements.” (Page 69)

“Bush 43 convened the Sharm el-Sheikh and Aqaba summits in 2003 to launch the Roadmap. National Security Adviser Rice was dispatched to the region and a U.S. official – John Wolf – was appointed to monitor Roadmap performance. At the summit, the president promised to “ride herd” over the parties, leaving the impression that he and his administration would stay closely engaged. But both Israel and the Palestinians demonstrated immediately that they would fulfill their commitments as stipulated under the Roadmap, and the United States did not respond. Thus a summit wisely convened to launch a diplomatic initiative ended up in failure because there was no follow-up. The parties have run out of patience, said a former Bush 43 envoy, “for summits and meetings and the Tabas and Sharm el-Sheikhs ... I don’t think these are very helpful unless there’s a process that sets it up” ... Such meetings should be used to help the parties narrow the boundaries of negotiations or to generate broad support for an initiative that is already under way; they should emerge from diplomatic activity or launch diplomatic activity so as to stimulate subsequent contacts and negotiations between the parties, as was the case in Madrid ... Despite the modest success of Annapolis, the Bush administration continued to signal that it would not go beyond a facilitation role, and that Israelis and Palestinians were expected to reach key understandings on their own.” (Pages 70-71)

**“Assurances and Understandings.** In conjunction with the convening of the Madrid conference, the Bush 41 administration offered the parties letters of assurances regarding U.S. policy. Each letter was negotiated carefully, but the parties also understood that, first, the letters would not be secret from one other; second, the United States did not intend to use the letters to change existing policy; and third, the letters would not contradict or supersede the agreed-upon terms of reference for the conference.” (Page 71)

“In January 2006, given Hamas’s record supporting terrorism and rejecting past agreements, there was no way the United States could have engaged in diplomatic dealings following the group’s victory in the Palestinian legislative elections. Moreover, as a donor, the United States had every right to condition its assistance. But in setting rigid, all-or-nothing preconditions for engagement after the election, U.S. diplomacy was perceived as confusing the positions of Hamas as a movement with the actions of the elected Palestinian government. The preconditions adopted by the Quartet closed off diplomacy. More adept, nuanced diplomacy would have reserved some flexibility for Washington and allowed the United States and its allies more space to test the Palestinian Authority’s adherence to earlier commitments under Oslo.” (Page 73)

“In sum, these various instruments of statecraft, especially when employed repeatedly, should be used with strategic objectives in mind, not merely as instruments to buy time or give the appearance of progress. The cost may be a loss of credibility and degradation of an important diplomatic tool.” (Page 73)

## **Recommendations for Future Administrations**

“The next president will be dealing with an even more complex and involved situation than the one that Bush 43 inherited from Clinton. Current events suggest that this problematic international milieu will continue for several years until the United States can extricate itself from Iraq in a manner that does not result in even greater regional upheaval. Local conditions could rapidly deteriorate, particularly in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. The president must confront the urgency of the U.S. troop presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, a looming confrontation with Iran, issues of energy security and the uncertain world of international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Rebuilding alliances and shoring up the resolve of the international community to continue the struggle against terrorism will surely be among the president’s highest priorities. In this respect, those voices calling for higher priority to the Arab-Israeli peace process could be drowned out in the swirl of policy debates and personnel choices that confront the next and future administrations. But this environment need not deter the next president from devoting energy and time to the Arab-Israeli peace process; indeed it may well be the right context to press for action on that front.” (Page 75)

“If the president fails early on to establish the Middle East peace process as a priority, sooner or later the conflict will flare up again and further complicate U.S. objectives. Waiting for the perfect moment for diplomacy is not an option. It will be up to the president to prioritize Arab-Israeli peacemaking, empower a foreign policy team that shares this view, and ensure that there is a senior focal point and a strong, experienced team within the administration to carry out its policy.” (Page 76)

“Future administrations must avoid the temptation to substitute photo opportunities and ill-prepared conferences and summits for real diplomacy. Summits, conferences, and envoys have meaningful roles to play in a well-executed diplomatic game plan. Well-timed meetings can galvanize parties to act, register progress made in quiet diplomacy, or impel new avenues or peacemaking. But such encounters need to be prepared for and part of a larger strategy ... The complex diplomatic environment should not persuade the next president to adopt a hands-off policy to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even a casual study of the Bush 43 approach demonstrates that the absence of U.S. engagement does nothing to ameliorate problems in the region and could exacerbate them while driving allies away. Moreover, as the Bush 41 and Clinton administrations demonstrated, active U.S. mediation brings with it a variety of related benefits on other regional priorities, not to mention the contribution to bolstering key alliances in Europe and the region.” (Page 77)

“It is impossible to know whether the two-state solution will remain viable for many more years. Every setback in peace diplomacy and every outbreak of violence has a negative effect on the attitudes supporting peace within Israeli and Arab societies. Despair, hostility, and mistrust have a way of hardening and giving rise to radical and destructive alternatives. The next president may not have much time to develop a way toward peace...” (Page 79)

“For many decades, administrations articulated long-standing U.S. policy interests and could count on a strong bipartisan base of congressional and public support to pursue their national goals. The study group heard from our legislators that bipartisanship continues to be the watchword in the Arab-Israeli peace process, but only if there is strong presidential leadership focused on an agreed-upon goal of a reasonable, fair, and just peace that ensures security for all sides. There will be differences within the public, press, and Congress over tactics, but these differences can be contained so long as there is a durable and forward-looking strategy around which the president seeks to rally support.” (Pages 79-80)

### *Specific Recommendations:*

1. **Send an Early Signal** - “First, the Arab-Israeli question ought to figure prominently in an early presidential speech, in which the White House need not articulate new policy, but simply send a loud and clear signal that the issue is high on the agenda.” (Page 80)

2. **Strategize to Perfect the Process** - “Second, from the first day in office, the president ought to charge those responsible for the Middle East portfolio with developing a strategy that works to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. The study group heard a great deal about process and the danger that it can substitute for diplomacy. The right process is certainly important to bring conflicting parties together, but even a superb process will never substitute for purposeful diplomacy based on clear aims and objectives.” (Page 80)
3. **State Dept: Do Your Homework** - “Third, U.S. diplomacy must prioritize locking in the gains of earlier negotiations, especially before public support in the region erodes or events on the ground further undermine prospects for a peaceful settlement. Washington needs to formalize and add permanence to U.S. positions on the core endgame issues of Jerusalem, refugees, security, and territory – in essence putting forward a successor to the Clinton parameters. Then, the task would be to seek an international endorsement, preferably through the United Nations Security Council ... Washington will need to do its homework and prepare its own set of detailed proposals and bridging ideas on the core final-status issues. The next administration should quietly activate a back-office State Department operation to develop a menu of options and to plan U.S. positions. (Pages 80-81)
4. **Invest in Bottom-Up Peace** - “Fourth, Washington should invest in nontraditional diplomacy, including track II dialogue and people-to-people peace-building activities ... Nontraditional diplomacy is a low-cost, low-risk complement to the formal negotiating process, and given the distance between the parties and the turmoil of recent years, these activities – including private political and diplomatic contacts, military and security dialogues, youth and interreligious programming, and health, business, scientific, and cultural activities – have taken on even greater importance.” (Page 81-82)
5. **Employ Contents of Diplomatic Toolbox Wisely** - “Last, the next administration should keep an open mind about how to deploy the wide range of diplomatic instruments at its disposal. Tools that have not been employed wisely need to be assessed with a view to either invigorating them or finding alternative ways to proceed. The Quartet has been in existence for more than five years but has yet to prove its worth. Its future ought to be examined carefully to see whether it can become more effective. Similarly, some institutions created under the Oslo process may require alteration...” (Page 82)

***“The United States sees itself to this day as an honest broker in the Middle East, and U.S. diplomats honestly try to be fair in mediating between Arabs and Israelis. The next president will need to ensure that the manner in which we conduct our diplomacy results in the peoples of the region sharing this perception. Addressing asymmetries in the peace process – as this book has advocated – does not mean tilting away from Israel. Rather, it means restoring the U.S. role to its historical purpose of helping the parties achieve their core requirements. Restoring this role surely will require the ability to listen and learn, but also the political courage and diplomatic wisdom to advance the United States’ long-term commitment to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East.” (Page 84)***

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