

# Camp David Redux

Clinton, Barak, and Arafat

# Crisis

- Clinton = “Holy Grail” with time remaining in office.
- Barak = party support, weaning public approval.
- Arafat = best chance since 1993, risk, eclipse by younger and more radical men. Trust new Israeli leadership?



# Life-support

- Hebron Agreement (Oslo II) 1995
- Wye River Memorandum 1998
- Fulfill promise to Rabin's memory
- Failure is arguably end of Interim Agreement

# Wye River

- Wye River, October 1998: Benjamin Netanyahu, Bill Clinton, Yasser Arafat.
- Netanyahu, found himself then bound by promises made by others that created political pressures for him in Jerusalem, specifically with regard to withdrawals from settlements
  - Clinton used the fifth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, an agreement hallowed by the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin to force both sides back to the negotiating table.
- Clinton called on King Hussein of Jordan to help in the negotiations after Carter-style shuttling between the camps failed to produce results, eked out an agreement after a marathon 21-hour negotiating session, commemorated with a solemn indoor signing ceremony.
  - The agreement laid out a timeline for land transfers from the Israelis to the Palestinians, based on security assurances, and set a target date of May 1999 for a final-status agreement.

# Sharm el-Sheik to Camp David

- After the Wye River timeline fell apart, the Palestinians and the Israelis—led now by Ehud Barak—set out a new timeline at Sharm el-Sheik, in 1999, which called for a final deal by February 2000.
- That date passed. A new summit in July 2000 was held at Camp David. Barak, it is widely [acknowledged](#), broke every precedent and appeared to offer the Palestinians sovereignty over East Jerusalem and a Palestinian state on the West Bank.
- But Arafat said no—a decision that has [been analyzed](#) for a decade, but one that was at least in part driven by, ironically, the concern that America's willingness to usher along an Israeli-led peace effort compromised its role as an honest broker between the two sides.

# Offer

- Two-state
  - ‘Control’ over Hamas
  - Jerusalem (later), settlements (later)
- Controversy over blame; played out in press
  - battle of legacy and memory
  - Clinton says Arafat
  - Barak says Arafat; politically broken
  - Arafat says Barak and Clinton

# Analysis

- Each side came to Camp David with very different perspectives, which led, in turn, to highly divergent approaches to the talks.
- *Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors* by Robert Malley and Hussein Agha (August 9, 2001)  
read full transcript online: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2001/08/09/camp-david-the-tragedy-of-errors/>



- Ehud Barak was guided by three principles.
- First, a deep antipathy toward the concept of gradual steps that lay at the heart of the 1993 Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO.
  - In his view, the withdrawals of Israeli forces from parts of Gaza and the West Bank during the preceding seven years had forced Israel to pay a heavy price without getting anything tangible in return and without knowing the scope of the Palestinians' final demands.
- Second, the Palestinian leadership would make a historic compromise—if at all—only after it had explored and found unappealing all other possibilities.
- Third, an analysis of Israeli politics led to Barak's third principle. He was convinced that the Israeli public would ratify an agreement with the Palestinians, even one that entailed far-reaching concessions, so long as it was final and brought quiet and normalcy to the country.
  - But the best way to bring the agreement before the Israeli public was to minimize any political friction along the way.
    - Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had paid a tremendous political (and physical) price by alienating the Israeli right wing and failing to bring its members along during the Oslo process.

# Analysis

- In Gaza and the West Bank, Barak's election was greeted with mixed emotions. Palestinians were looking for early reassuring signs from Barak; his first actions were not.
- Seen from Gaza and the West Bank, Oslo's legacy read like a litany of promises deferred or unfulfilled.
- Six years after the agreement, there were more Israeli settlements, less freedom of movement, and worse economic conditions.
- Powerful Palestinian constituencies—the intellectuals, security establishment, media, business community, “state” bureaucrats, political activists—whose support was vital for any peace effort were disillusioned, doubtful of Israel's willingness to implement signed agreements, and, now, disenchanted with Barak's rhetoric and actions.

- Most disturbing was Barak's early decision to concentrate on reaching a deal with Syria rather than with the Palestinians, a decision that Arafat experienced as a personal blow.
- Like Barak, Arafat felt that permanent status negotiations were long overdue; unlike Barak, he did not think that this justified doing away with the interim obligations.
- Unfulfilled interim obligations did more than cast doubt on Israel's intent to deliver; in Arafat's eyes, they directly affected the balance of power that was to prevail once permanent status negotiations commenced.

# Analysis

- Barak's actions led to a classic case of misaddressed messages:
- the intended recipients of his tough statements—the domestic constituency he was seeking to carry with him—barely listened, while their unintended recipients—the Palestinians he would sway with his final offer—listened only too well.
- Never convinced that Barak was ready to go far at all, the Palestinians were not about to believe that he was holding on to his assets in order to go far enough.
- For them, his goals were to pressure the Palestinians, lower their expectations, and worsen their alternatives. In short, everything Barak saw as evidence that he was serious, the Palestinians considered to be evidence that he was not.

- For these reasons, Camp David seemed to Arafat to encapsulate his worst nightmares.
- It was high-wire summitry, designed to increase the pressure on the Palestinians to reach a quick agreement while heightening the political and symbolic costs if they did not.
- And it clearly was a Clinton/ Barak idea both in concept and timing, and for that reason alone highly suspect.
- That the US issued the invitations despite Israel's refusal to carry out its earlier commitments and despite Arafat's plea for additional time to prepare only reinforced in his mind the sense of a US-Israeli conspiracy.

# Analysis

- The United States faced a formidable challenge.
- Again, administration officials believed there was a historic opportunity for an agreement as in 1993, and 1998.
  - Barak was eager for a deal, wanted it achieved during Clinton's term in office, and had surrounded himself with some of Israel's most peace-minded politicians.
  - Arafat had the opportunity to preside over the first Palestinian state, and he enjoyed a special bond with Clinton, the first US president to have met and dealt with him.
  - President Clinton, was prepared to devote as much of his presidency as it took to make the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations succeed. A decision *not* to seize the opportunity would have produced as many regrets as the decision to seize it produced recriminations.

# Definitions

- Arafat viewed offer as part of larger and future negotiations.
- Considered important prior interim agreements
- Barak was giving what was politically available.
  - On 'own' timetable and all-inclusive.
  - Selfish and self-interest for both personalities

# Decision-types

- Neoclassical Realism
  - self-interest
- PH theory
  - mistrust and misjudgments



# Outcomes

- Domestic support is lost
- Increase of terror
- End of Clinton presidency
- End of Barak premiership
- Arafat grip on power remains
  - Palestinian discontent continues