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Trends. Peace, Peace of Mind, and Mideast Mindlessness

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Recently, the Clinton administration's negotiator, Dennis Ross, in the Arab-Israeli conflict recently has provided public guidelines for the Bush administration and other interested parties. Unfortunately, the guidelines are characterized by language subverted by wishfulness more than strengthened by a pathway to make wishes a reality.

Mr. Ross states that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian National Authority (PNA) President Yasir Arafat both want peace but define their "central needs in a way that conflicts with those on the other side." The implication is that they need to construct central needs that don't conflict or give up central needs. The problem with this analysis is that neither option may be dependent on the ability and/or motivation of the leaders--although Mr. Ross may wish otherwise.

Mr. Ross states that both sides want peace. However, there are many sides to the conflict, not just two. And as wishful as Mr. Ross may be for peace, the peace desired by some sides to the conflict denotes the peace coming with the death and destruction of the adversary. The latter is probably not acceptable to the adversary in question.

Mr. Ross states that the PNA and the Israelis need to negotiate a limited agreement on the political issues--such as granting the Palestinians their sovereign state and providing Israel meaningful security. According to Mr. Ross, the borders and the relationship between the two states would still need to be negotiated over time. However, how can a sovereign state be granted without defined borders? And the relationship between the two states (as well as ultimate intentions about acceptable conflict resolution) significantly affects and is affected by the reality that Israel time and time again receives promises of meaningful security, while the PNA--in return--receives more tangible concessions usually involving territory.

Finally, Mr. Ross dooms his own project by stating that one serious incident will undo any agreement and recreate an explosive situation on the ground. Given the history of Mideast terrorism, such an incident is a certainty.

Mr. Ross is to be commended for his many years of hard work in seeking peace in the Mideast. Is it any wonder that a wish for such a worthy goal unintentionally conflates the wish with reality during conflict analysis? (See Bar-Talal, D. (1990). Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A cognitive analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14, 7-29; Cohen, S.P., & Arnone, H.C. (1988). Conflict resolution as the alternative to terrorism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 44, 175-189; Kelman, H.C. (1999). The interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian national identities: the role of the other in existential conflict. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55, 581-600; Kelman, H.C. (1999). Building a sustainable peace: The limits of pragmatism in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 5, 101-115; Mazen, A.M. (1998). When settlement and resolution are in conflict: Searching for a Mideast peace dividend. *Negotiation Journal*, 14, 357-367; Ross, D. (February 9, 2001). Peace, one very small step at a time. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Dennis Ross, Israel, Mideast Peace, Palestinian National Authority, PNA.)