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Aaron David Miller. *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace*. Bantam. 407 pages. \$26.00

So little public interest has the latest round of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians generated that on this year's endless campaign trail neither of the two parties' presumptive nominees for president has bothered to take much note of it. Given the negotiations' slim prospects for success and hidden costs, the candidates' lack of attention is understandable.

Nevertheless, last November's Annapolis Conference, conceived by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to culminate in a final status agreement by the end of 2008, could have been seen as a step forward. Although recently expectations have been scaled back considerably — to achieving a “shelf agreement,” or agreement on principles, to inform the achievement of a final status agreement at some unspecified future date — it was the first time that Israelis and Palestinians gathered around an international conference table based on the explicit understanding that the resolution of the conflict between them involved two states living side-by-side in peace. With the attendance of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan among a host of nations, Annapolis provided an opportunity for the U.S. to bolster relations with Arab countries that share, in theory at any rate, a determination to curtail Iran's sponsorship of terror in Iraq, in Lebanon, and in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. And it gave America a chance to demonstrate its commitment to work jointly with Israelis and Palestinians along with interested nations and international organizations to achieve a just and lasting piece in the heart of the Middle East.

But Annapolis also suppressed harsh realities. Most fundamental, in achieving a final status agreement, no Palestinian leader can settle for anything less than full Palestinian sovereignty in most of the West Bank, while no Israeli leader can agree to full Palestinian sovereignty until the terrorist cells exposing the greater Tel Aviv area — Israel's commercial and cultural hub and home to half the country's population — to suicide bombers and Katyusha and Kassam rockets have been rooted out. Moreover, returning to the negotiating table at Annapolis meant the abandonment by the Bush administration and Israel of their clearly-declared position that progress toward peace depended on the Palestinians' halting terrorism. The result was to reward Palestinian weakness and lack of resolve in combating the terrorists among them — if not Palestinian terror altogether. And finally, the focus on an elusive final status agreement diverted attention and energy from building Palestinian factories, schools, roads, houses, and hospitals in the West Bank, the sorts of interim and incremental undertakings that can be accomplished in the absence of a final political settlement while creating conditions more favorable to one.

Although he ends his book sounding a cautiously optimistic note about the latest round of negotiations, Aaron David Miller, currently a public policy fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for scholars and for two decades before that a State Department official involved at the highest levels in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, provides ample reason to be skeptical of the Bush administration's bid to achieve dramatic progress in the next five months. Indeed, it is a striking feature of Miller's engaging and textured account of his experiences and lessons learned from advising national security advisors, secretaries of state, and presidents across three administrations that it furnishes materials that clarify why, sadly, the renewed Middle East diplomacy he supports and which Secretary of State Rice is vigorously pursuing is unlikely to bring peace anytime soon to the troubled region.

Sporting a university of Michigan Ph.D. in Middle East history, Miller came to Washington in the early 1980s without any ambition to become a diplomat, indeed, disposed to doubt the efficacy of Middle East diplomacy. But he got swept away, and in the end chastened, by the peace process that eventually, following the breakdown of the Clinton administration's July 2000 Camp David summit, led to a new, more vicious round of war:

I began my career as Dr. No, a skeptic, an unbeliever really, in diplomacy and peacemaking; along the road to Madrid and in the Oslo years that followed, I underwent something of a conversion into Dr. Yes, a missionary spreading the word about the power of negotiations; and when, in the wake of the second intifada, everything we'd worked on collapsed, I fell back to something in between.

Since his resignation from the State Department in 2003, Miller has gone on to head Seeds of Peace, a nonprofit organization that brings young Arabs and Israelis to the United States for common programs to promote mutual understanding and develop a new generation of leaders.

Miller's book rightly emphasizes the dependence of diplomacy on leadership. In thoughtful case studies, he praises the strategic vision that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, brought to his shuttle diplomacy, which produced enduring disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria; Jimmy Carter's tenacious efforts that culminated in the historic 1979 peace agreement that Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin signed at Camp David; and James Baker's tough negotiating hand at Madrid in 1991, where, "for the first time ever Israelis, Syrians, Jordanians, and particularly Palestinians sat at the same table and launched bilateral negotiations that broke taboos, legitimized Palestinians, and continued for the better part of a decade."

Unfortunately, Miller also overstates the importance to strong American leadership of compelling Israelis to make substantial concessions, while significantly understating the failure of American leadership to create incentives for Palestinians and Arab states to moderate their stance toward Israel. For example, over the years American diplomacy could have focused more effectively on inducing Palestinians to renounce terror. American

diplomacy might also have worked more assiduously to persuade Arab states to recognize Israel and assist with the amelioration of Palestinian penury. And American diplomacy ought to have attended to but has virtually ignored the United Nations Relief and Works Agency which, along with providing much needed social and economic assistance to the Palestinians, has done much to embitter them and prolong the conflict with Israel. The un created unrwa in 1950 to deal with the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees that resulted from the war of aggression launched by Arab nation states against the newly independent state of Israel. To this day unrwa encourages Palestinians — in accordance with its un mandate but contrary to un policy in regard to virtually all other refugee groups dating back to the global redrawing of borders following World War II — to continue to think of themselves as refugees whose just claims can only be met through return to the lands and homes left 60 years ago by their parents, grandparents, and even in some cases great-grandparents in the midst of the Arab onslaught on Israel.

In contrast to his lavish praise for Kissinger, Carter, and Baker, Miller faults President Clinton — who embraced the 1993 Oslo Accords and pushed throughout his presidency for final agreements on the hardest issues: Jerusalem, borders, and refugees — for poor leadership. According to Miller, Clinton did not press Israel hard enough about its settlement activities. But, though Miller does not seem to absorb its significance, what he himself says Clinton did not press the Palestinians on was vastly more extensive and critical. Clinton, he argues, “should have been far tougher with the Palestinian leader on violence, terror, incitement, the absence of rule of law, transparency of governance, and honest fiscal management of Palestinian institutions.”

Miller portrays the summit hosted by President Clinton at Camp David in July 2000 as the nadir of American peace process leadership. To be sure, there is in Miller’s telling plenty of blame to go around. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak arrogantly believed that he could, in one fell swoop, achieve a comprehensive peace agreement with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. Weak and mendacious to the end, Arafat responded to Barak’s offer at Camp David of land for peace not with a counteroffer but by storming away and, a few months later, unleashing the second intifada. But the biggest culprits to emerge from Miller’s account were Clinton and his diplomatic team, led by Secretary of State Madeline Albright and National Security Advisor Sandy Berger.

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Himself a member of that group, Miller nevertheless maintains that the Clinton administration’s approach to what it grandly regarded as an “end-of-the-conflict summit” was ill-conceived and undisciplined. The Clinton team lacked a sustained strategy, holding endless disorganized meetings with Barak and Arafat involving a confusing array of committees and issues but without a negotiation schedule, timeline, or intermediate

objectives. The team did not provide a negotiating text to focus discussion. Instead of adopting Jimmy Carter's "we'll stay as long it takes" attitude, which led to a breakthrough at the first Camp David summit in 1978, the Clinton team sought to cram the negotiations into a week to allow President Clinton to travel to the mid-July G-8 in Japan. It labored under a profound misconception about Arafat's willingness to compromise, unprepared to believe that when Barak made an unprecedented offer of a more than 90 percent withdrawal from the West Bank, and of Palestinian sovereignty over part of the Old City of Jerusalem, Arafat would insist on 100 percent of his demands or nothing. It failed to secure in advance wider Arab support for compromise on Jerusalem. The team arrived at Camp David without a plan B, in the event — more likely than not — that they did not achieve a comprehensive political agreement. And, not least, though Miller affirms Clinton's mastery of detail and his empathy for both Israelis and Palestinians, the president, Miller maintains, lacked the strategic overview, the focus, and the toughness necessary to resolve one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

Owing in no small measure to the collapse of the Camp David summit and the suicide-bomber war with which Arafat responded to it, "George W. Bush," Miller acknowledges, "inherited a bad hand on the Arab-Israeli issue, and he knew it." Miller criticizes Bush for not doing more to advance negotiations, but it's not clear what more Bush might have done. In 2002, in announcing his roadmap for peace, Bush became the first American president to explicitly call for the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Bush also demanded that, for negotiations to go forward, the Palestinians must bring terror to an end. Unfortunately, for the last six years, to say nothing of the last 60, Palestinians have proved unable or unwilling to do so.

Nevertheless, Miller faults the Bush administration's strategic vision: "The 9/11 attacks intensified the tendency to see the Middle East problem as a clash of values rather than as a contest of interests over occupied territory, Jerusalem, water, or settlement." In fact, the Bush administration never denied the contest of interests. Miller's criticism of it for doing so reveals the one-dimensionality of his strategic vision. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians involves a contest of interests and a clash of values — and for both sides, honoring their values represents a vital interest.

For all of his soul-searching, Miller never manages to get to the heart of the matter. He is thwarted by his conviction that blame for the conflict must be distributed evenly between the parties. "In the end," he contends in one way or another throughout his book, "this struggle was about good people caught up in a nasty conflict who managed, however imperfectly, to preserve their humanity and faith in the future." To be sure, honorable and decent people on both sides did get caught up in the conflict. And both sides have advanced just claims and have endured searing harms. Yet all this, without more, obscures the hard truth.

Sixty years after the establishment of the State of Israel, a fundamental asymmetry marks the conflict with the Palestinians and the larger conflict with the Arab world. A prosperous liberal democracy amidst a sea of autocracies, Israel, notwithstanding many mistakes, from the beginning sought peace and has made painful sacrifices to secure it. In contrast, too few Palestinian leaders have wanted to live in peace alongside a Jewish state, too many have sought to instill in their people hatred of Israel, too many Palestinian people have proved receptive to their leaders' message of undying enmity, and, at every historic opportunity, too many Palestinians — leaders and ordinary people alike — have embraced war.

This history, though very much a presence in the Palestinian and Israeli popular imagination, plays next to no role in Miller's analysis. In November 1947, the United Nations voted to create a Jewish state and an Arab state out of what little was left of the original British Mandate in Palestine. The Jews of Palestine welcomed the partition plan, while the local Arabs and larger Arab world opposed it and responded with violent attacks on the Jewish community. As surrounding Arab states prepared for war to wipe out the Jews, the Jews prepared to defend themselves. Following Israel's Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948, armies from Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Syria invaded and sought to destroy it. But Israel prevailed. In 1949, the five defeated Arab states signed separate armistice agreements, which suspended hostilities with Israel but did not establish peace. Israel controlled about 50 percent more territory than the UN partition plan had assigned it. Sixty years later, on Israeli Independence Day, Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, and Arabs around the Middle East still conduct public ceremonies to mourn what they call "al Nachba," the disaster.

As they did at the time of Israel's founding, again and again Palestinians have chosen violence and war over negotiations and peace. In the 1950s, long before the West Bank or Gaza Strip were in Israel's hands, Yasser Arafat founded Fatah, which was dedicated to the liberation of Palestine — by which Fatah meant the liberation of that part of Palestine controlled by Israel — through armed struggle. In 1964, still three years before Gaza and the West Bank were under Israeli hands, Arafat founded the larger Palestine Liberation Organization.

In June 1967, in response to various acts of war by Egypt's Gamel Abdel Nasser, Israel launched a preemptive strike. Lightning victory against the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan left Israel, six days after the war began, in possession of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. Within ten days of the war's conclusion, Israel sought peace by offering to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and the Golan Heights to Syria. But in September, Egypt, Syria, and other major Arab states meeting in Khartoum gave their answer to Israel's desire to exchange land for peace in their famous three nos: "no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel."

Israel leapt at the first opportunity to make peace with an Arab nation when in 1977 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat declared his willingness to come to Jerusalem and to negotiate. Sadat's initiative culminated in the 1979 Camp David Accords, in which Israel agreed to give up the precious strategic depths afforded by the Sinai in exchange for a full peace with Egypt. For this sin against pan-Arabism, Egypt was expelled later that year by the Arab League.

When Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat was at last ready to at least publicly signal the renunciation of violence, Israel sat down with his plo first in Madrid and then at Oslo. But Arafat drove a stake through the heart of Oslo in September 2000 by instigating the second intifada.

And in January 2006, six months after Israel had evacuated every Israeli man, woman, and child from the Gaza Strip, Palestinian voters gave Hamas, which remains devoted to armed struggle against Israel and to the use of attacks against civilians as a key element of its strategy, a majority in the Palestinian Authority legislature. After winning election, Hamas stepped up Kassam rocket attacks on southern Israel. Every one of the thousands of these rockets, indiscriminately launched at civilian populations over the last five years, constitutes a war crime.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad may represent a new generation of Palestinian leadership ready to concentrate on improving the conditions under which their people live and committed to real peace with Israel. But to achieve prosperity and secure peace they must overcome three generations of corrupt leadership that has consigned the Palestinian people to squalor and misery in order to nourish hatred of Israel.

The crux of the problem today — alas, no better recognized by the architects of Annapolis than by Miller — is that too many Palestinians, following Hamas, refuse to accept the existence of, and continue to wage war against, Israel. You can call that a contest of interests. You can declare it a clash of values. Whatever name you give it, if you wish to advance the peace process, you must understand it and defeat it.

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