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The Mess We're In: How America's Leaders Have Failed in the Middle East

What I will give you tonight will be sobering and indicative of the concern that I have, and that I hope you will share with me, that we're in a mess and our leadership has failed us in the Middle East.

Let me begin this way. In the last 30 years, since the end of Vietnam, we've sent more money, sold more weapons, sent more troops, invested more political and diplomatic capital, fought more wars and lost more lives in the Middle East than anywhere else in the entire world, even before this current war in Iraq. All that is true. And yet we find ourselves today enmeshed in a war in Iraq where we are grounded down, with literally no way out, in a war that we began without understanding how we would get out. A war we began in a region we know so little about.

I remember before the war I actually offered a resolution at the Democratic National Committee saying, "How are we going into war if we don't know the consequences? How do we go into a war if we don't know the terms of commitment? How do we go into a war if we don't know what we're asking of our young men and women and of the American people?" I was told at the time, "This isn't the time to raise that issue. Let's just get this resolution passed and let's get on. We want to have this election be about the economy, about health care, about social services." And I say, "The election isn't going to be about any of those. It's going to be about Iraq and we have to take a stand." The Democratic Party did not. The resolution passed the U.S. Senate and then the House and then we were at war.

I debated the people who designed this war. They can tell you all kinds of things today about why we went into this war or what we expected in this war, but when I debated them they said seven days and it would be over. They said it would be six months and we'd be home; they said it would only take 90,000 troops, maybe a few more; they said that we would be greeted with flowers, and they said that democracy would bloom in Iraq and it would spread like wildfire through the Middle East. That's what they said because they didn't understand Iraq, they didn't understand the Middle East, and they didn't understand America in the Middle East. The lie is not weapons of mass destruction. The lie is we went into a war not understanding the region in which we were fighting and

we operated either with a lie or delusion about how this would come out. We're overseeing as well a failed Middle East policy with tragic consequences to the people of Israel, the people of Palestine and, I believe, the United States as well.

In polling that we've done, we find that America is at an all-time low in the Middle East, and that's saying something because we polled in 2002 and found at that time, the question was asked "why do they hate us," and the answer was given "because they hate our values." But we've found that in the ten countries we polled that they really liked our values. They liked the American people, they liked our concepts and practice of democracy and freedom and they liked our educational

system, they liked our science and technology, they actually liked our movies—only the French didn't like our movies. What they didn't like was our policy. In polling there are terms that they use; they talk about some poll numbers that drag others down and some that push others up. After 9/11, when Bush's numbers went up to 82, if you asked the question, "Who was smarter, Bush or Clinton?" the American people said Bush. The attitude towards him after 9/11, the confidence they had—in other words, that pulled the other numbers up. But in the Middle East, anger over our policy drags our other numbers down. So when you say, "What do you think

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about America?" the numbers would be from 20 percent on down.

Today, in every country in which we've polled, our favorable rating is in the single digits. Added to it is the anger over our failed policy towards Israel and the Palestinian conflict, now policy in Iraq, and even more



disturbingly our treatment of Arabs and Muslims both at home and abroad. All of this has placed us at risk, placed our interests at risk, and placed our allies at risk, and yet what is maybe most disturbing, is that there is no real debate in this country about our policy in the Middle East. When there's a discussion at all, it's over incidentals—was the war fought at the right time or the wrong time? Was it well planned or not well planned? Did we have enough allies to handle this war via success? But never over the fundamentals of our policy in the region, and no real discussion, no real understanding of the history or the culture of the people of the Middle East, and yet we were not

a part of their history. I remember when our troops went into Baghdad I said, "We've now become part of their history. We will be interpreted in their history as part and parcel of waves of others who've come and made their mark in that world." When you enter someone's history, you ought to know their history because you're being seen through the eyes of that history, not through your own eyes. You're being seen as they see you, not as you would like to see yourself.

How did we get there? First and foremost, I think we got into this mess because for 80 years we've really ignored the Arab world and Arab realities. They were either pawns to be moved around on the chessboard or they were problems to be solved. They were never really people with legitimate aspirations that we needed to understand. Yes, they were for a while. After World War I, Woodrow Wilson enunciated the Fourteen Points, one of which was the right of self-determination. Specifically, he was speaking about the people who had come under Ottoman colonial domination

who were liberated after World War I who wanted, and aspired to, independence. What they wanted was an independent unified state. Wilson apparently sided with that. When the British and French announced that they were going to carve the region up into mandates, into areas of influence, with the British getting a couple of places and the French getting a couple of places, with lines being drawn on the board that would create whole countries that never existed, borders and identities that had never before marked the region, we sent a commission to do the good old-fashioned American thing—to ask the people what they wanted. The King-

Krane Commission came back and said, "It's not what they want. They really want—95 percent of the people we've talked to—really aspire to independence and sovereignty in a unified region." But America was, not a part of the world, but apart *from* the world. And so we ceded to the British and French their control and they got what they wanted, and so for 30-something years, during the Mandate period, these new identities took hold. There was a Lebanon and a Syria and then Jordan and, yes, a Palestine, later to become Israel, and an Iraq.

The Armenians and the Kurds can tell the story of what these lines on the board all meant in terms of their national aspirations and their identities, and how they became part of other countries and how their aspirations were denied to them after World War I. We are still seeing that play out in Iraq today.

That is something that we had no understanding of when we went there. After World War II we inherited the mess the British and the French had created. We became the superpower that was going to right the wrong, that was going to take hold of this place and somehow protect the region for a new reason. The British and French wanted the Middle East because it controlled the land routes to the East and it controlled the sea passages to the East. The British wanted Palestine because it would control the northern border of the Suez Canal and it was to be a colony that would protect their access to the wealth of the East. The French wanted Lebanon and Syria because, similarly, it controlled the land routes to the East. After the war it was ours and, like I said, for a new reason, because now there was a Soviet threat. And so it went from being spheres of influence to now protecting the region and its new resource—oil—from Soviet domination. We began, after World

War II, to see the Middle East solely through the prism of the Cold War. Anthony Lake [Council address Feb 24, 2005], who served in the first Clinton administration as National Security Advisor, wrote a fascinating book on

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the dangers that existed during the Cold War, of how we misunderstood the aspiration of peoples all over the world—or how we ignored the aspirations of people all over the world because we saw them through the prism of the Cold War. It was a national liberation front, a movement fighting against colonial oppression. We sided with the side that was oppressing because the national liberation front was probably being supported by the Soviet Union. And so they picked their side and we picked our side, and all too frequently the side we picked was the side of the existing domination. And the Soviets picked the other side, and we then fought it out. The people of the Middle East, not unlike people of other continents, became pawns in this game and we found ourselves all too frequently on the wrong side.

The region also was infected, I think, by another problem that was purely a domestic American problem. It was the problem of domestic political pressure. I'll never forget the story of Harry Truman when he first recognized the State of Israel and the partition, which was enormously controversial at the time. He was approached by people from the State Department who said, "Don't do this. Don't do this because there are enormous interests

and the Arabs have aspirations." At one point they told him, "Franklin Roosevelt actually promised the King of Saudi Arabia that he wouldn't do this unless he consulted with them first." Truman responded at one point rather abruptly, "I'm president. He's not." And then secondly, he was said to have responded, "I have many American Jews among my constituents. I have no Arab voters." And so he sided with the partition, and it was something that the Arab world never forgot.

I found an article recently from November of 1952, in *Readers' Digest* of all places, written by Stephen Penrose, who at the time was President of the American University of Beirut. The article is headlined "The Arabs Don't Love Us Any More," and the theme of the article was they don't love us because we abandoned them and they don't think we love them. We don't love them, he noted, because we've ignored the plight of the Palestinians. We allowed the partition to take place with no justice to the Palestinians and we've never addressed the national aspirations of these people. That was in 1952.

More recently, in addition to this issue of the politics of pressure, is this question of ideology and religion, which has come to play an enormous role in the shaping of American thought toward the Middle East. Let me start with religion. Back in 1988 Jesse Jackson ran for president. He ran on the Democratic side and unleashed a political force in the Democratic Party that unfortunately he didn't sustain. On the Republican side in that same year Pat Robertson ran for president and unleashed a political force in the Republic Party that he did sustain. He created a movement of Christian conservatives who believed in what for most Christians had always been a heretical school of thought, that taught

that the Old Testament has to be re-lived exactly—chapter and verse—in the new dispensation to usher in the final days. As part of this ideology, as part of this theology of Christian conservatism, the notion is that the Jews must be gathered, they must be supported by the people of God, the final battle will occur, the world will undergo this Battle of Armageddon and Jesus will return to usher in the final age. I frankly find it disturbing that we have a political force in this country that strong. For most of us the notion is to avoid conflict, not to encourage conflict. But watch Pat Robertson when there's a war going on in the Middle East and look at that weird grin as he goes to the board and says, "They're coming. Yes, the battle is coming." He wants it to happen. And the Jewish people of Israel have become fodder in this game of bringing on the final battle. It's an enormous political force that shapes the thinking of how we deal with the Middle East, and on top of that we have neo-conservatism, which is a secularized version of the same, which has a very

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similar world view: number one, it has a Manichaeian world view. There's good and evil—we're good, they're evil; secondly, there's an absolute inevitability and desirability—the conflict between good and evil. We cannot sustain a world in which good coexists with evil, we must fight and we must defeat them. Thirdly, they believe in the Apocalyptic outcome of this

battle. We will fight them, we will defeat them, it's inevitable, and good will emerge. When asked why there was no plan for Iraq, frankly it was because the neo-conservatives didn't believe a plan was necessary. It would be Apocalyptic. We would use shock and awe, destroy, and out of the sheer power of our will good things would come and it would fall in place.

There are no fools in the State Department and there are no fools in the U.S. military. They had plans galore. Our military planners are the finest in the world and have contingency plans for everything. When General Shinseki said 350,000 troops at a minimum to get this job done, he wasn't joking. He meant it because he planned this out. They planned out what it would take to pacify the country and move toward some new stable social order. The State Department had detailed plans for providing services, for sustaining the situation if a war was to be fought. Not that they wanted it, but if it was to be fought, here's what was needed to make it happen. The Pentagon threw them out in the infantile fantasy belief that it would all just fall in place and democracy would bloom.

Now, the power of those schools of thought that shape this thinking is pretty much why we are today where we are. But it didn't just begin there, because we've always faced this kind of political pressure that has shaped our approach to the Middle East, even when presidents haven't gotten it right. Nixon and Ford understood that they needed to act decisively to stop violence, but after the 1973 war when there was pressure to create a peace settlement to finally end this, they surrendered to Congressional pressure which said, "No, you can't do this." So Kissinger came to the fall-back position. Instead of a settlement, we would go for a peace process. We

wouldn't pressure an outcome. We'd rather allow the parties to work through a long and involved process. Actually, Kissinger's notion of process was sort of momentum for the sake of momentum. As long as you had the parties moving it didn't matter if they were going anywhere; they were just

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focused on something other than making war. Europe wanted a settlement after 1973; Israel didn't, political pressure groups in America didn't, and Henry Kissinger fell back on the notion of a process.

Carter, when he was first elected, met with Leonid Brezhnev. They came to an agreement. The agreement enunciated principles for a Middle East peace settlement, but by the time Carter got home 76 U.S. Senators had signed a letter saying "don't go there Mr. president, don't even think about it." Carter backed down. When George Bush did the same after the Gulf War he unleashed Secretary of State James Baker to create the same kind of pressure on Israel that would force the parties after the Gulf War to come to the Madrid Conference. And Israel, through Yitzhak Shamir, was known to have said in an interview, "They're putting pressure on us. We'll teach

them pressure, we'll use our allies in Congress," and he came up with this loan guarantee idea whereby Congress would give Israel \$10 billion in loan guarantees in order to facilitate the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews in Israel which he felt would be a block against any withdrawal from the territories. Bush put his foot down and said, "No." But he dealt with significant pressure after that.

I remember Bill Clinton was elected on the basis that he would never publicly pressure Israel, and he didn't. But what he did do was use subtle but very real pressure to keep the peace process going. I remember when Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister on the basis that he would end the peace process. Interestingly enough, if you go back and look at the historical record, an advisory paper was written from Netanyahu on how to end the peace process. It was called "making a clean break," and it was on how he should develop closer relations with the Republicans in Congress, because they were his natural allies and shared a similar vision. And the vision was that you cannot compromise with value. Instead, we must confront and press for change in the Middle East to create democracies because only then would there be peace. Who wrote the paper for Netanyahu? Richard Perle, who became chair of the National Advisory Board of the Pentagon, Douglas Feith, who was Under Secretary of Defense, and David Wormser who's the number one advisor on Middle East Affairs to Vice President Cheney. Three American neo-conservative leaders. People said to me at one point, "Gee, it's interesting that Sharon and Bush sound alike." Well, yes because they have the same people writing stuff for both of them. I will never forget the scene here at LAX—Clinton's plane on the tarmac and Netanyahu's plane on the tarmac—

and they sat there side by side for about an hour and one-half and Clinton was too busy to meet him, but flew back to Washington to meet the former Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, and the wife of the deceased prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and had an all-day event that Mel Levine and I were at with Arab-American and American-Jewish leaders celebrating the peaceful vision of Yitzhak Rabin while Netanyahu was still in the country. Clearly subtle, but very real pressure to make change. But when Clinton put too much pressure on Netanyahu, 81 senators sent him a letter, again reminding him "don't go there, don't do that."

After the horrific violence that rocked Israel in March 2002 when three terrorist bombs went off and murdered scores in Israel, Ariel Sharon marched into the West Bank to reoccupy, and tremendous damage was done in a short period of time. On April 4 President Bush came forward with a speech that could only be described as an inherently balanced effort to push both sides forward and here's what he said: "This has to stop." And he told Sharon to move back, and he told Arafat that more had to be done, and he laid out to both, here's what Arafat must do and here's what Sharon must do. To accomplish it, Bush sent Secretary of State Powell to the region. He started in Morocco and he worked his way across North Africa and Jordan and into Israel. By the time he got there—it took him ten days from the time the president announced the visit until the time he was there—the following happened: Gary Bauer did a

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press statement denouncing the president and it was reported in the papers that Gary had pressured Israel to do this. The next day there was an ad in the newspapers taken out by Ralph Reed saying the same thing. A couple of days later there was a press conference with Bill Bennett and a number of other religious right leaders saying the same thing, and a couple of days after that John Kyle, Senator from Arizona, did an unprecedented thing; he brought to the U.S. Senate Benjamin Netanyahu, who at the time was still in opposition to Sharon in the Likud. Kyle invited him to the Senate to speak to 17 U.S. Senators to condemn the Secretary of State's mission while he was still in the region trying to

negotiate peace. Two days later President Bush announced Ariel Sharon was a man of peace and Arafat had to go. That was on April 17. I spoke with Secretary of State Powell and those who were with him on the trip and they said they felt as if their legs had been cut out from underneath them. He was in the middle of the region trying to negotiate, and he was told literally to come back, it's not going to happen.

In other words, the fact is, that despite all of this tragedy, despite all that we've seen, political pressure at home is simply a lack of understanding of what we're up against, and what we're doing in the region has created a situation where there is no debate. There is no debate on these critical issues of importance in the Middle East. Instead of the debate, we make use of excuses, if you will. There are other ways we want to explain what's

happening. The Bernard Lewis explanation of why Arabs hate us or why there is a problem? Because we have shown too little resolve. Bernard Lewis, bless his soul, is a brilliant Orientalist, is unfortunately too hamstrung by his own antipathy toward all things Arab. His reason why the Arab world has run amuck is because we've shown too little resolve in using force with them, that if only we were more disciplined in our force they would get the message, that every time we've pressured them we've only pressured them so far and we relent and that reinforces their bad behavior. That's one solution. That's one reason why there's a problem.

The other reason we give sometimes is that there's too little democracy in the Middle East. I'll talk about that for a moment because democracy is not, as the president describes it, God's gift to humanity; it is rather an evolving system of governance that reflects a certain level of social and political development. You're seeing in Iraq and Afghanistan today what happens if social development has risen to the point where democracy can take hold. In Afghanistan you have an election, but it's an election under a system of governance run by warlords. Frankly, if it were Central America we'd call it drug cartels. It is not an open process. It is not a process that easily repeats itself. There are no political parties. The same is true in Iraq. In Iraq, instead of political parties what you have are sects, you have competing ethnicities and you have, even within these sects, competing schools of theology, each of which has its own absolute leader. In that situation what you will get is not democracy but an enhanced form of tribe and sect leadership. That's very different from democracy and we have to be careful of that. What will win in Iraq if democracy reigns is the rule of ayatollahs—that's what will happen.

And in Afghanistan, whether we like it or not, if you read the book *Imperial Hubris*, what you will get before the end of the day in Afghanistan is another rule like the Taliban but maybe not quite the Taliban. But you're not going to get the flourishing of liberal democracy—there are no social

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conditions to sustain it in those countries. We cannot fool ourselves about that.

Let me tell you a funny story. In Saudi Arabia I once visited with one of the princes who had called for elections and I give him a shirt that we made here in America. It said "YALLAH." In Arabic, "Come on, hurry up, let's vote," and it's a shirt we gave as a gift to our young students who go out and register voters in the Arab communities. So because he had given this speech calling for the vote I gave him this shirt. He held it up while we were having dinner with 12 tribal leaders from the neighboring area and he said, "Gentlemen, what do you think of the shirt?" and they said "It's a shame, you shouldn't say that, it's wrong, you shouldn't use God's name that way." And another guy said, "No, that's not what it means. It really means just hurry up, let's go." "No, no, no. You can't say that, it's wrong."

Forty-five minutes later the Prince said to me, "Have you noticed they haven't started on the 'Vote' part yet?" He said, "Guys, what about voting?" One said, "I think it's a good idea," and somebody else said, "You would—you have the largest tribe and you'd win everything." And the Prince said to me, "That's the biggest problem here. Tribal domination still reigns supreme and so people will go tribe, they won't go party. There is no such thing as a political party right now. We modernized, we urbanized but we didn't de-tribalize." So we have to be attentive to the social circumstances.

There are those in Saudi Arabia who want elections now. Those on the extremist end of what we call the Islamic extremist wing of thought. Why? Because they really believe that if there's democracy the leadership will all go and therefore the governments will fall into their hands and they'll be able to throw the Americans out and destroy Israel. That's their concept of what an ideal democracy would be. That's not exactly what I think we have in mind. We have in mind a liberal form of democracy. A couple of hundred years ago when the founders signed the Declaration that all men were created equal they only meant *some* men. They didn't mean black men, they didn't mean red men and they didn't mean people like me. They meant white men of property. So when the vote was taken in Virginia to ratify the Constitution it passed – 86 to 76 – and if I'm not mistaken there were a whole lot more than 162 people in Virginia at the time. It took time to evolve, but even that group was far more socially advanced and politically and ideologically advanced than the countries that we're operating in now, attempting to create a Jeffersonian form of liberal democracy.

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somehow we want to see Islam by some definition as an extremist form of religion when frankly it's not. Christianity isn't either, Judaism isn't either, and Hinduism isn't either; even though Hindus and Muslims massacre each other at will in India, neither of the two religions are by definition extremist. And despite what the Old Testament says was done to the worshippers of Bael and the Moabites and whatever, Judaism is not an extremist religion. I was a student of Christian thought in the early centuries and even though Augustus said "I came after you as a fisherman seeking your souls and when you avoided me I now come after you as a hunter" and massacred ten thousand of them, I don't think Christianity by definition is an extremist religion. But all religions can become extremist. When they did the lynchings in the South and you see those pictures you sometimes notice that the guys all have suits on because they're doing it on Sunday right after they go to meeting. That's when they did the lynchings. That didn't make it an extremist religion; it just meant that it was used for those purposes under those social circumstances.

The problem is not Islam and the problem is not as, bless his soul, Prime Minister Alawi in Iraq wants to suggest, that it's just a bunch of thugs and gangsters. It's actually much more complex as to why there is a resistance in Iraq today. Yes, there are thugs and gangsters, but there also embittered and angry people, furious over what has happened in their daily lives.

Granted, some people in Iraq today are freer than they were before. But I'll never forget the exchange when my students at Davidson College were engaged in a television debate with students in Baghdad after the war. The students in Baghdad were largely middle class, granted, they were Sunni, some of them may have been Baathists,

but they were sitting in that studio under hot lights and they were mad. Why? Because they hadn't had any air conditioning, it was 110 degrees, and they hadn't had any running water and they hadn't had any services and the oil ministry was protected but the museums were looted, and they couldn't walk out on the streets during the day or night. They were angry about the lack of security in their lives, and they said, "Saddam was brutal but at least we could walk the streets." And frankly speaking, we have to answer to the Iraqi people for the failure to provide for fundamental basic needs that would have made people feel more comfortable with what we were about. Failing to take that into account led to bitterness, led to hostility. With every one we kill there's a family angry at us that may, in fact, decide to take it out on us. And so the problem with insurgency in Iraq is as not simple as thugs and gangsters who we simply have to get rid of.

And the problem isn't that they don't understand us. If they just understood us better—if we showed them nice little videos of people in Toledo worshipping at the mosque, then they would all love us better—that's not the problem either. The problem is that we have failed to take into account the fact that they do know us, but what they know about us is not what we know about ourselves. In the polling that we did what we found is that they didn't like us, and they didn't like us not because of what we stood for but because what we stood for we didn't apply to them. Understand, people do not judge you by what you say about yourself. They judge you by what you do to them. It's just that simple, and because we paid no attention to that simple rule our allies in the region are at risk, our interests are at risk and stability is at risk and attitudes towards America are at an all-time low.

Four years ago I could have proposed a simpler thing. You could have tweaked the peace process a little bit or you could have done just a little bit more to provide the basic needs in one region or another, but it's far more dramatic than that today. We've entered, I think, a very dangerous time, for bitterness is rampant and the image of our country is something that none of us would recognize because it's not the America we want it to be. And the first thing I think you have to do is acknowledge a problem. Get to know that there's a problem. There is a problem and it's not a problem

that public diplomacy fixes and it's not a problem that is just about "them." It's a problem that is in part about us as well. We haven't understood the region. Leadership on both sides has failed us. There has not been balance in our policy and we've been insensitive to the needs of the people of the region. It's just that simple. More of the same won't do. My mom used to say, "If you're in a hole and want to get out, the first thing is to stop digging." Doing more of the same doesn't make it right. It actually makes it worse, it gets the hole deeper, and frankly it makes the way out more complicated.

Neither will fixes like public diplomacy or energy independence, as if somehow we become energy independent from the Middle East, and then what? They go away and we won't have to worry about them any more? If you're energy independent

it's a good domestic program. It's not bad. It creates jobs at home. We will never be energy independent of the Middle East. China is not going to be energy independent from the Middle East, and if China goes down ultimately we go down. We live in an interdependent world. There is no part of the world we are independent of. We may survive higher gas prices or we may become energy independent, but Europe will never be and if Europe goes down we go down. Our dollar is tied on the foreign market, our products are produced abroad, and our

products are sold abroad, and frankly we will never be independent or rid of any region of the world. We have to address those regions, not pretend that somehow we can write them off and ignore them. It's a great applause line in the political speech, but it has nothing to do with political reality and we ought not to pretend that it is.

First thing I suggest is that we have to reverse the course set by Henry Kissinger in the 1970s. There is no way today to have a peace process or to pretend, as we have all these years, that this warring couple—Palestinians and Israelis—if we just left them alone in a room they'd finally work it all out. That's the mistake that we made after the Oslo agreement. I'll never forget when they signed that historic agreement; there were flowers being put in the barrels of the Israeli guns, there was euphoria on both the Israeli street and the Palestinian street

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and what did our very clever Middle East negotiator say? "It's now time for them to work this out. We'll just let them solve this." It was like the couple that had been having marital problems for more than two decades coming to a counselor and saying, "We need help" and his answer is, "Great, I'm glad you know you need help. Now I'm just going to leave the two of you alone and you try to work this out." They needed us then and we didn't help, but we can't do that now. There is no such thing as a peace process. We must work towards implementing a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute first and foremost. It's the central wound in the region and it's the issue that divides us from the region. It used to be said that the road to Jerusalem will be paved through Baghdad. In other words, we create liberal democracy in Baghdad and then it would flower throughout the whole Middle East — it's the other way around. General Zinni, who had been the head of CENTCOM, said it best when he said, "It's actually the other way around. The road to Baghdad is paved through Jerusalem." You prove your bona fides in the region by solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. And even the best we can do from our liberal spokespeople is we have to reengage the Arab-Israeli conflict as if somehow doing the old Kissingerian—create an illusion of movement to compensate the real movement--will fool people that we're doing something. We're not going to be fooled any more. Something must occur to solve the issue.

Here's what I propose. I propose combining the best of what the last two presidents have done. The current President Bush projected a vision of two states. That is the right thing to do. Bill Clinton offered a detailed plan of how to get there. It was the right thing to do, but he did it too late in his

administration. He should have done it a year before but his advisors told him not to—"Let Barak make the offer." It was the wrong offer made by the wrong

we have to do is what James Baker did, which is apply real American pressure to both sides and make them understand that the deal on the table is the only deal they get and they have to adapt themselves to the realities imposed upon them by that deal

man and it never worked. And I saw Bill Clinton in those last several weeks desperately trying to close the deal on a plan that was brilliant. The problem was that it was too late in the game and he never defined the end. Bush is now defining the end. It's two states. The parties negotiated at Taba even after Clinton left the White House and they came awfully close. The outline of what an agreement could look like is there. The third thing that we have to do is what James Baker did, which is apply real American pressure to both sides and make them understand that the deal on the table is the only deal they get and they have to adapt themselves to the realities imposed upon them by that deal. No tweaking, no playing around, no trying to carve little areas out here or there to keep what isn't yours in the first place. But ultimately there is no second chance. We have to propose a vision, we have to present a plan to how to get to the vision, and then we have to tell both sides "this is it" and we have to sell it.

And it can be sold. I went with Clinton in 1998, I went with him to Jerusalem and I went with him to Gaza. I saw him go over the heads of Netanyahu and Arafat and talk directly to the people on both sides and he did it. He could have sold his deal then. He just didn't have it ready to offer.

Both people want a way out of this mess; they need leadership to do it, and frankly speaking it's not just Arafat—it's the leadership on both sides who aren't ready, aren't strong enough and aren't willing to take the risk, to do what needs to be done. But you know what? It's no longer their game to play. It's ours, too. We're at risk because this process isn't working and if we don't realize it we have our own lives to save and this is bigger than that. It's now American credibility, it's American interests that are at risk in this entire process. We have got to bite the bullet. Because by not doing it, our neglect has created literally monsters on both sides. We spoil the Israelis so that even Ariel Sharon, is threatened with a civil war by his own right, if you can imagine a right to the right of Ariel Sharon. And on the Palestinian side, the spoilt child syndrome is what I'm talking about. You spoil a child long enough and he's going to go whacko on you. On the Palestinian side we've abused them long enough and they've gone whacko on us and there's this cult of death that's taken hold there that is a nightmare for the people of Palestine and the people of Israel, both of whom are paying a horrific price for this total despair, total hopelessness, that has led a generation of Palestinian young people to want to commit suicide and see that as the only form of honor they can get in their lives. Frankly, it is neglect that has led to this situation for both peoples.

Both have to pay, and I believe both would be willing to pay, if we were

willing to define the price for them. If our leadership is not strong enough, then our people must demand it, which is why I'm going around the country with this talk. We're in a mess and our leaders don't get it, but the people must demand it. I know because we've polled. I know that the American people want this problem solved. We've polled the American-Jewish community and we've polled the Arab-American community, and you know what? They both give their answers within a margin of error of each other. It may be surprising to some, but it's true. Both want Israel secure, both want a secure independent Palestinian state, both want to condemn and see an end to this terrorism, both want settlements rolled back, both want a peace settlement where America leads. Two-thirds to three-quarters of both communities want America to be even-handed and balanced--what Howard Dean got beaten up for during the last election. They want America to be even-handed and not take sides, because they know that if America takes sides, everybody loses.

I hope this is the last presidential election when we don't debate the Middle East because I hope the American people will say, "We're paying the price for your neglect." We have to have leadership that tells us the truth and makes demands on us and makes demands on our allies in the region to do the right thing, because frankly this is not getting better, it's only getting worse.

Thank you.

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