Arafat Rejected Peace in 2000

Introduction

Recent peace agreements between Israel and UAE, Bahrain and Sudan have changed the face of the Arab-Israeli conflict and revealed a pent-up frustration among Arab nations with the long-standing Palestinian veto on their ability to normalize relations with Israel.

Arab nations have not suddenly become "pro-Israel" or abandoned their support for a Palestinian state, but they are more willing to call out Palestinian mistakes and lack of gratitude for longstanding Arab support. This dynamic was starkly on display in a recent interview of Prince Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia on Al Arabiya, a Saudi-owned television channel. Bandar spoke for over an hour, focusing on Palestinian leadership mistakes over the decades, capped off in the final part recounting the colossal error committed by Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat in rejecting a peace agreement with Israel in 2000-2001. Even though these events are twenty years old, Bandar puts it front and center, demonstrating its enduring importance in discourse about the conflict. This article will review the old and new evidence showing the tragedy of Arafat's "no" response to an attractive peace deal, despite continued attempts by many to absolve Arafat and the Palestinians of fault.

In July 2000 the U.S., led by President Bill Clinton, hosted and mediated the Camp David Summit with Israel, led by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and the Palestinians, led by Chairman Arafat, to negotiate a conflict-ending peace agreement. After two weeks of intensive discussions the negotiations broke down without an agreement. Soon afterwards the Palestinians launched the Second Intifada, which seemingly dashed hopes for further negotiations. However, the parties continued to remain in contact and on December 23, 2000, with Bill Clinton entering the last month of his presidency, he called the two sides to the White House and dictated a set of final peace terms, known as the Clinton Parameters (the "Parameters"), which sought to bridge the gap between the Israeli and Palestinian positions. The Parameters offered the Palestinians substantially
more than the proposals made at Camp David, seemingly providing everything most observers thought would satisfy the Palestinians: 1

- Creation of an independent Palestinian state with contiguity on 94-96% of the West Bank with additional compensation from a land swap with Israel of 1-3%, resulting in close to an equivalent 100% of the West Bank, and 100% of Gaza. The plan also called for a dedicated link between the West Bank and Gaza.

- Jerusalem divided under the principle that existing Arab areas would be Palestinian and Jewish ones Israeli. This would apply to the Old City as well, which would thus be divided.

- Regarding the Temple Mount/Haram, the Parameters acknowledged that there were a number of formulations already discussed and Clinton suggested two more. The Parameters envisioned some form of control or sovereignty of the Temple Mount by the Palestinians, the Western Wall by Israel, and a shared arrangement under the Mount. The Parameters acknowledged that some of the formulations were more about the wording and less about day-to-day control.

- Palestine would be a non-militarized state, with certain security guarantees for Israel.

- On the issue of refugees and “Right of Return” the Palestinian refugees would not be able to “return” to locations inside Israel without Israeli approval, instead, they could return to the new State of Palestine. This formulation would be “consistent with the two-state approach...the State of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian People and the State of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people.” Clinton referred to refugees returning to “historic Palestine,” but only to the portion comprising the new Palestinian state, to satisfy that the “Right of Return” had been met.

- End of conflict agreement that would end to all claims and satisfy all relevant U.N. resolutions.

Clinton asked each side for a yes or no response by December 27th. It was made clear that a “yes” meant agreement within the Parameters and that a non-response, a maybe, or acceptance outside the Parameters would all be considered rejections. Clinton presented the Parameters as take-it-or-leave it, and if not accepted, they would all be off the table once Clinton left office on January 20, 2001. 2 It was understood that the Parameters were a framework for a deal that would still need negotiation to finalize, but one that settled the thorniest questions. As detailed below, Barak agreed to the Parameters while Arafat effectively said no via a vague response combined with a list of reservations that directly and materially contradicted the Parameters.

In the immediate aftermath of these events it was generally accepted by key observers and the media that Arafat had made a grave error in rejecting a deal that Barak accepted. However, not too long afterwards and in the years since, revisionist historians and journalists have endeavored to portray the events as far more ambiguous, inherently flawed and misunderstood, thereby absolving Arafat of fault. Revisionists generally fall under three camps: assert that both sides effectively rejected the plan; lay the primary blame for failure on Israel and the U.S., and; acknowledge that Arafat said no but paint the process as so intrinsically flawed and stacked against the Palestinians that the rejection cannot be faulted.

Why is it important to continually establish the truth over a 20-year-old event? Why do those who are more strident towards Israel gravitate towards revisionist narratives to absolve Arafat of fault? Because acknowledging that Arafat rejected a plan that would have given Palestinians a state and nearly everything they seem to desire even now would greatly impact the discourse on the conflict today. By absolving Arafat or blaming “both sides,” the 2000-2001 peace talks become a non-factor in the discussion of the conflict today, just another in a long line of failures which then allows Israel's de-
tractors to bring everything back to “the settlements” and “the occupation,” meaning the lack of peace is all Israel’s fault.

This point of view was on display in December 2016 when Secretary of State John Kerry gave a speech addressing the Obama administration’s relationship with Israel and the reason behind his decision to abstain from a U.N. Security Council vote to criticize Israel’s settlements in the West Bank. In a 70-minute speech which recounted many historical aspects of the conflict, Kerry devoted exactly one vague sentence to the Camp David era: “President Clinton deserves great credit for laying out extensive parameters designed to bridge gaps in advanced final status negotiations 16 years ago.” No mention of the Palestinian rejection of the same vision for a peace deal that Kerry outlines later in his speech. It’s as if 2000-2001 did not happen, just a footnote which allows Kerry to blame the settlements as the long-standing obstacle to peace and to his concluding platitude: “It is up to Israelis and Palestinians to make the difficult choices for peace.”

If it is actually fully acknowledged that Israel did accept the Parameters and final peace while Arafat declined, then the portrayal of a perpetually intransigent Israel which refuses to end its occupation is false. If true, then it’s not just “the settlements” that is the impediment to peace, since the Palestinians rejected an opportunity to end the occupation and form a state. If true, it begs the question of why the Parameters were not good enough for the Palestinians—what else do they actually want today that was not offered previously? Why would they say yes today when they said no 20 years ago? Why does the onus still remain on Israel to make the next offer? These are questions that Israel’s detractors prefer to bury. Instead, it is easier to maintain the view that the Palestinians are still waiting for the more powerful Israelis to make the move that will end their rule over the Palestinians.

As the evidence compiled below will definitely demonstrate, the fact is that the Palestinians said no to the Parameters and Israel said yes. Arafat said no because it did not meet the maximalist demands of the Palestinians, who saw the negotiations only as a way to cure the injustices they believe they suffered at the hands of the Israelis, particular their demand for the literal “Right of Return” that would allow millions of Palestinians to “reclaim homes” inside Israel. This article will also examine and rebut the key revisionist viewpoints.

### Camp David & the Clinton Parameters

This article is going to skip over the July 2000 Camp David summit since the Clinton Parameters “end game” is far more important. The best review of the events at Camp David was written by chief U.S. negotiator Dennis Ross, published as The Missing Peace in 2004. Broadly, from the Israeli perspective and backed by Ross and numerous observers, Arafat and his team rejected all proposals and did not offer reasonable counterproposals of their own. Arafat famously denied that a Jewish Temple existed on the Temple Mount and instead insisted that the real temple was built in Nablus. The fact that Arafat could not accept even the most basic Jewish history in the region was seen by both the Israelis and Clinton as an insult to their intelligence and a sign that Arafat was not negotiating in good faith. From the Palestinian perspective the offers were not sufficient, their delegation was not properly respected by the Americans and Israelis, and they were forced into a process that was set up as a trap for them. In September 2000, the Palestinians launched the Second Intifada which stalled the negotiations. There is much debate on the causes of this event, but this too is outside the scope of this article.

The Clinton Parameters later that year dramatically improved the peace package in favor of the Palestinians, so it is this plan that is most important to assess. As chief Israeli negotiation Gilad Sher noted, the Parameters were “the high point of the entire American effort to bring the sides to a Permanent Status agreement.” After the failure at Camp David and the Second Intifada, Clinton sought to reengage the two sides about
a month prior to the end of his presidency in the hopes of completing a deal. Here is how each side responded.

The Israeli Response

Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the Israelis responded affirmatively to the Clinton Parameters. The response was accompanied by a document listing clarifications and reservations, which were points of concern and Israeli positions on details not specified in the Parameters. The affirmative response was considered by Israel, Clinton and U.S. negotiators to be within the Parameters. Palestinians negotiators have not disputed the affirmative Israeli response. In later public statements Barak expressed that he would not agree to give up sovereignty over the Temple Mount, but these words did not contradict the affirmative response. Clinton noted in his delivery of the Parameters that there were a variety of solutions related to the Temple Mount and recognized that most of the discussion was “not related to practical administration but to the symbolic issues of sovereignty.”

Gilad Sher, head of the Israeli negotiating team, explained that on December 27th the extended Israeli cabinet met to discuss the Parameters. Following a series of meetings and discussions the Prime Minister’s office prepared a response document to Clinton’s proposal “accepting his ideas as a basis for continued negotiations toward a Permanent Status agreement, provided that they remain, as they are, a basis for discussion acceptable to the Palestinians.” Sher confirmed that the letter noted certain reservations and a list of clarifications necessary for a final agreement, but within the context of the Parameters.

Dennis Ross corroborated these events: “Barak convened his security cabinet in Jerusalem and they voted to accept the Clinton ideas with reservations. But the reservations were within the Parameters, not outside them. Barak’s government had now formally accepted ideas that would effectively divide East Jerusalem, end the IDF’s presence in the Jordan Valley, and produce a Palestinian state in roughly 97 percent of the West Bank, and 100 percent of Gaza.”

President Clinton also confirmed these events:

On the twenty-seventh Barak’s cabinet endorsed the parameters with reservations, but all their reservations were within the parameters, and therefore subject to negotiations anyway. It was historic: an Israeli government had said that to get peace, there would be a Palestinian state in roughly 97 percent of the West Bank, counting the swap, and all of Gaza, where Israel also had settlements. The ball was in Arafat’s court.

Martin Indyk, a senior member of the American negotiating team recounted in a 2016 interview that he received the acceptance document by fax to his residence. In a heated discussion with journalist Mehdi Hasan on Al-Jazeera, Indyk had this back and forth with Hasan:

Hasan: And both sides tabled reservations to the Clinton Parameters in December 2000, as you well know.
Indyk: No, No, Barak accepted them.
Hasan: That’s not true, but we’ll have to agree to disagree on that.
Indyk: I was there—
Hasan: Ok.
Indyk: —when the fax came from Barak’s office to my residence in Israel with the formal decision, signed by the prime minister, accepting the Clinton Parameters. So don’t tell me that I don’t know what I’m talking about.
Indyk’s forceful response greatly rankled Hasan as it was a clear contradiction of Hasan’s view that Arafat was not to blame as both sides rejected the plan; Hasan’s tone of hostility to Israel was evident throughout the interview. A few days later Hasan wrote a piece disputing Indyk’s precise personal recollection but offered no evidence to rebut Indyk. 10

Saudi’s Bandar also confirmed the Israeli acceptance, an important source as the representative of arguably the leading nation in the Arab world. It was Bandar that Arafat wanted by his side in the last day of his decision-making process to ensure that he had the endorsement of the Arab nations. Bandar recounted that Clinton told him: “I have Israeli approval now, if Abu Ammar [Arafat] came here I will make this announcement with him, Barak will come here and the three of us will meet and announce the agreement.” 11

Finally, Robert Malley, a member of the U.S. negotiating team, also confirmed the Israeli approval of the Clinton Parameters, despite his revisionist points of view. As discussed below, Malley blamed flaws in the negotiating process and Barak’s actions for failure in the process, thereby absolving Arafat for saying no. Malley and co-author Hussein Agha stated: “It is also beyond dispute that while the Israeli cabinet accepted Clinton’s ‘Parameters,’ Arafat took his time, waiting ten days before offering his response—a costly delay considering the fact that only thirty days remained in Clinton’s presidency.” 12

The Palestinian Response

The Palestinians did not provide a response by the deadline set by Clinton. As Ross explained, “There were only mixed messages from the Palestinians on the twenty-seventh…[Egyptian President] Mubarak pleaded with us to give Arafat more time and not to treat his non-response as a no. President Clinton agreed to that…” 13

Anyone reading the Palestinian newspapers on December 27th would have already known that the Palestinians intended to reject the Parameters. Akram Haniyya, Arafat’s advisor, member of the Camp David negotiating team and chief editor of the Palestinian daily Al-Ayyam, wrote an editorial that day titled “American Fast Food” criticising Clinton’s motives and noting that the Parameters were unacceptable. The “Right of Return” was key: “[Clinton’s ideas] propose mechanisms for solving the Refugee Problem - the heart of the Palestinian problem - that negate the wording of Resolution 194 regarding their return to their homes. They propose instead the options of re-settlement of refugees, return to the Palestinian state, immigration to other countries, or compensation.” 14

On January 2nd Arafat went to the White House to meet with Clinton and delivered the message that the Palestinians would not agree to the Parameters. Ross explains: “It was clear: [Arafat] was not up to ending the conflict, and already had effectively rejected the President’s ideas. His reservations were deal-killers, involving his actual rejection of the Western Wall part of the formula on the Haram, his rejection of the most basic elements of the Israeli security needs, and his dismissal of our refugee formula. All were deal killers.” 15

While some revisionists characterize Arafat’s response as merely ambiguous, it is easy to verify that Palestinian reservations were well outside the Parameters. Arafat’s response was published on the same day in Al-Ayyam, the same newspaper that telegraphed the rejection days earlier. 16 Arafat’s letter begins: “We seek, through this letter, to explain why the latest American proposals, that were presented without any clarifications, do not meet the required conditions for a lasting peace.” While the long letter lists several points not compatible with the Parameters, the many clauses on “Right of Return” are most glaring:

The American proposal wholly endorses the Israeli position that the Right of Return must be entirely dependent on Israel’s discretion. It is important...
to note at this point that Resolution 194, which serves as the basis for a just settlement for the Refugee Problem, determines the return of the Palestinian refugees ‘to their homes’ and not ‘to their homeland’ or ‘historical Palestine.’ The essence of the Right of Return is the freedom of choice: the Palestinians should be given the right to choose their place of living, including the homes from which they were expelled. There is no historical precedent of a people that gave up its fundamental right to return to its homes, whether they were expelled or ran away out of fear. The Palestinian people will not be the one to create this precedent. Recognizing the Right of Return and allowing the refugees’ freedom of choice are a prerequisite for ending the conflict.

To emphasize the importance of this fundamental issue the last line of the letter reiterates: “We cannot accept a proposal that does not include the establishment of a viable Palestinian state that does not guarantee the right of the refugees to return to their homes.”

Further evidence of the Palestinian position can be found in an internal PLO Memo from the Negotiations Support Unit dated January 2nd, the day Arafat met with Clinton. The first clause reads: "Any resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict must be in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, General Assembly Resolution 194, and international law. We cannot accept a proposal that secures neither the establishment of a viable Palestinian state nor the right of Palestinians refugees to return to their homes." The memo specifically clarified that the return the Palestinians demand is to “their homes”, wherever located—not to their ‘homeland’ or to ‘historic Palestine.” The memo further demanded that Israel “acknowledge its responsibility” for the “refugee problem” and rejected defining the new Palestinian state as “the homeland of the Palestinian people” because “this nullifies the right of return.” Finally, the memo enshrined the Palestinian rejection that a Jewish Temple ever existed: "In the first formulation regarding the Haram, accepting that the Western Wall is a part of either “the space sacred to Judaism” or “the Holy of Holies” will amount to implicit recognition that the Temple lies under the Haram.”

Arafat’s “no” has been fully corroborated and harshly criticized by Bandar in his October 2020 interview. Bandar recounted how he flew to Washington D.C. on January 1, 2001 to meet with Arafat, along with Egyptian Ambassador Nabil Fahmy, to discuss Arafat’s meeting with Clinton the following day. According to Bandar, Arafat indicated he would reply yes to Clinton and asked Bandar to immediately call Prince Abdullah, King Hassan and President Hosni Mubarak to declare their support for the Palestinian acceptance. Bandar assured Arafat that not only would they support the deal, but so would the Gulf States and Jordan. Bandar and Fahmy met with Arafat the next day, and as Bandar revealed, Arafat lied to them that he said yes to Clinton. Bandar, at first not knowing about the lie, congratulated Arafat, but then received a call from the White House that Arafat did not accept. Bandar recalled saying to Clinton: “But Abu Ammar [Arafat] says that he agrees, Mr. President.” Clinton replied: “He is lying, he said he would be back in half an hour, and we have been waiting for him for two hours.” Bandar lamented the Palestinian rejection:

I wanted to cry, my heart was burning at how the opportunity was lost again and perhaps for the last time, as if I was seeing a movie playing in front of my eyes. An opportunity comes, and it is lost. After it is lost, we agree on what we rejected, and we put it on the table. Then people say that there is nothing on the table, and so on over and over.

Bandar also revealed that he asked Clinton not to hold the Palestinians responsible and Clinton agreed to simply say “we have not reached a solution.” This is an important exchange because the non-criticism of Arafat helped fuel revisionist historians who sought to absolve Arafat of his rejection. We can only speculate on the difference in history if Saudi Arabia immediately and publicly announced its opinion about Arafat and his choice.
Revisionists might dismiss Bandar’s recent comments as an exaggerated reaction to Saudi anger at the Palestinian response to the recent peace agreements. This theory is easily refuted since Bandar is on record telling the same story in March 2003, well before Saudi and Israeli interests against Iran converged, in a profile published in The New Yorker. The article quoted Bandar’s comments to Arafat at the moment of truth on January 2, 2000: “I hope you remember, sir, what I told you. If we lose this opportunity, it is not going to be a tragedy. This is going to be a crime.” The writer added: “Bandar believed that Arafat’s failure to accept the deal in January of 2001 was a tragic mistake—a crime, really. Yet to say so publicly would damage the Palestinian cause, which had been championed by the Saudis, who would then lose any leverage they still had.”

In response to Bandar’s interview on Al Jazeera, Martin Indyk published a series of comments on Twitter that provided further color and corroboration:

I can attest to the accuracy of [Bandar’s] account of Arafat’s failure to accept the Clinton Parameters in December 2000. Note Bandar confirms that: 1. Barak accepted the Clinton Parameters. 2. Arafat lied when he told the Saudi and Egyptian ambassadors that he had accepted them. 3. Rather than pressing Arafat to accept, Bandar ran away. Years later King Abdullah told President Clinton that it was his greatest regret that he did not press Arafat to accept the Clinton Parameters. I heard directly from Mubarak’s Egyptian advisers that he too regretted not pressing Arafat to accept. This is the other side of Bandar’s story. Arab leaders are prepared to support the Palestinian cause but they will not press the Palestinians to compromise. They fear Palestinian denunciation of their pressure more than they fear Palestinian criticism of their normalization of relations with Israel. Therefore the Pals would be wiser to use normalization to leverage concessions from Israel than to cling to a failing anti-normalization policy that will leave them standing on principle but losing all Arab leverage to achieve those principles.

All the above evidence should be sufficient, but we can also look at Palestinian comments that readily admit, proudly, their rejection and refusal to negotiate down from their maximalist positions. Saeb Erekat, a Palestinian negotiator and recently deceased leading figure was interviewed on Al Jazeera in 2009. He acknowledged the Palestinian rejections in 2000 and 2008 (another key rejection beyond the scope of this article) because the Palestinians would accept nothing less than 100% of their demands. Erekat commented:

It is true that the negotiations continued for many years, but don’t you know that President Yasser Arafat was besieged in Camp David and was killed unjustly, only because he adhered to Jerusalem, and because he refused to let the Israeli measures on the ground give rise to any [Israeli] right or any [Palestinian] obligation? The Palestinian negotiators could have given in in 1994, 1998, or 2000...

Let me recount two historical events, even if I am revealing a secret. [Emphasis added] On July 23, 2000 in his meeting with President Arafat in Camp David, President Clinton said: “You will be the first president of a Palestinian state, within the 1967 borders—give or take, considering the land swap—and East Jerusalem will be the capital of the Palestinian state, but we want you, as a religious man, to acknowledge that the Temple of Solomon is located underneath the Haram Al-Sharif.” Yasser Arafat said to Clinton defiantly: “I will not be a traitor. Someone will come to liberate it after 10, 50, or 100 years. Jerusalem will be nothing but the capital of the Palestinian state, and there is nothing underneath or above the Haram Al-Sharif except for Allah.” That is why Yasser Arafat was besieged, and that is why he was killed unjustly.

Erekat twice mentioned the idea that the Palestinians are “not in a marketplace or bazaar” implying that the concept of negotiating any of their absolute demands is inconceivable.
Ahmed Qurei (also known as Abu Ala), another lead Palestinian negotiator, confirmed to columnist David Brooks in a July 2001 interview that it was the Palestinian intention not to make counterproposals and that they simply waited for Israel to satisfy their demands, since it was Israel that committed crimes in the name of Zionism. Qurei said: “I cannot give proposals... It is impossible for now to 1,000 years that the Palestinians will decrease their size from the 1967 borders... To ask me, is to ask how many kilograms I will cut from my own body. This will never happen.”

Akram Haniyya, a member of the Palestinian negotiating team at the time, recorded a diary of the meetings and published them as The Camp David Papers. Although the diary focused on the earlier Camp David summit the language clearly indicated the absolute stance of the Palestinians throughout the negotiations. Regarding early negotiations on refugees, Akram Haniyya wrote:

> It was strange because Israel continued to deny the crime. There is a complete denial of the Nakba and of the Israeli responsibility in causing it. It was the Palestinian negotiator who must be convinced that there were no massacres or campaigns of terror, expulsion and house demolitions. And that the Arab countries should be blamed for the Nakba, who, according to Israel convinced the Palestinians to leave their homes and wait for liberation!!... Israel refused to take moral and legal responsibility for the Nakba. There is only a willingness to express sorrow over what befell the Palestinians as a result of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. And because talk of the right of return was a taboo for Israel, tantamount to a declaration of a war of destruction on Israel, there was a rejection of any talk of putting a timetable for the implementation of the return. All that Israel would talk about was compensation for the refugees, not from its pocket, but from the pocket of the international community, and part of the funds would be used to compensate Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries. Israel only committed itself to allowing several thousands to return within ten years through family reunification and humanitarian cases.

The Camp David Papers also summarize the final position on this matter conveyed to Clinton, again confirming the stance presented in the response to the Parameters:

- An insistence on the right of every Palestinian refugee to return home as stipulated in UN Resolution 194;
- Establishment of a mechanism to implement this right, and to begin the implementation with the return of refugees in Lebanon and then, establish a timetable, including numbers, for the return of all those who wish to do so;
- A refusal to discuss the issue of Jews who left the Arab countries and their compensation.

Finally, the diary confirms Arafat’s denial of Jewish history: “[Arafat] often indulged in long explanations with his American host about lessons in religion and history, about the Al-Aqsa mosque and denying Israeli allegations regarding the potential existence of the temple underneath it.”

**Aftermath**

On January 3, 2001 The New York Times reported that Arafat flew back to the Middle East “trailed by reports he was prepared to accept, but with reservations.” It was unclear to the world at this point what exactly happened. The article acknowledged that one of the reservations was that Palestinian refugees would only be allowed “to return to a Palestinian state, but not to their former homes in Israel” which “reflects a wholesale adoption of the Israeli position.” Jake Siewert, the White House spokesman, is quoted: “Chairman Arafat told the president that he had accepted the president’s Parameters. At the same time, he expressed some reservations. What that means is that
both sides have now accepted the president’s ideas with some reservations. That represents a step forward.” Siewert refused to reveal the reservations each side had even though Arafat’s letter was in the public record and already showed refusal to accept the parameter on “Right of Return.”

Siewert’s comments are often cited by revisionists as proof that Arafat, like Barak, in fact accepted the plan with reservations, but also within the Parameters. Clinton seemed to back up Siewert in remarks to the Israel Policy Forum on January 8th: “Both Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat have now accepted these Parameters as the basis for further efforts. Both have expressed some reservations. At their request, I am using my remaining time in office to narrow the differences between the parties to the greatest degree possible.”

Why would Siewert and Clinton state that Arafat accepted the plan with reservations, but not reveal that those reservations were well outside the Parameters or that the Saudis and other insiders already knew the peace plan was dead? Because there was still time before Clinton left office and a shred of hope remained that a deal was still possible. This thinking was confirmed in a press briefing given by Richard Boucher, spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State, on January 3, 2001. Boucher stated that he could not characterize the specifics of the reservations but that the negotiators would continue to ”work with each side on these reservations, see if we can reconcile them.” Thus Siewert’s comment did not reveal to the public the truth already known by Clinton, Barak, Bandar and others—which is that Arafat rejected the Parameters.

The next day it seemed that observers understood the situation, perhaps they had a chance to review Arafat’s letter published in the Palestinian press. On January 4th, The New York Times editorial board published the following:

Israel and the Palestinians have now both conditionally accepted President Clinton’s Mideast peace proposals as a basis for further negotiations. But Yasir Arafat’s acceptance yesterday appeared so strewn with reservations that reaching a final compromise in the next two and a half weeks may prove beyond reach... the Palestinians have published a set of reservations that seems to reopen all three major issues—Jerusalem, refugees and settlements.”

Clinton indicated that he would use his remaining time in office to narrow the differences and indeed Palestinian and Israeli negotiators, who had already returned to the Middle East, continued to meet. Shlomo Ben-Ami, an Israeli negotiator in these final meetings, said to the Palestinians: “All your reservations are beyond the scope of the president’s parameters, which means you are not interested in concluding this process under President Clinton. It’s a shame. We have gone a long way. We renewed the negotiations after Arafat explicitly declared he wanted to reach an agreement. Here you prove the opposite and try to negotiate the parameters themselves.”

Dennis Ross suggested that he fly to the Middle East to help with this last gasp effort. Barak liked the idea, but Arafat replied that he would not be available, with a meeting scheduled instead with President Ben Ali of Tunisia. Ross explained that “This was another no.” “How many times did Arafat have to tell us no before we heard ‘no’? How many times could excuses be made for him? Those who argue that we just ran out of time ignore the many opportunities Arafat had refused... They ignore his actual rejection of the specifics of the Clinton ideas.”

With time running out the peace process was effectively over. After Clinton left office the two sides continued to meet in Taba, Egypt, to try to salvage something. While the general atmosphere has been described as positive, there was no expectation that suddenly a deal would be struck after Arafat’s rejection, Barak about to leave office and newly inaugurated President Bush focused on other priorities. The Israelis still considered the Parameters as the “blueprint for a permanent solution” but it was obvious the Palestinians were not going to agree to something they just rejected a week earlier.
Arafat quickly moved on, evidenced by a speech he gave at the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 28, 2001 where he harshly accused Israel of a long list of heinous crimes such as starving Palestinians, exterminating them with depleted Uranium and waging a barbaric war especially against their children. The speech was even more of an outrage as Shimon Peres just moments earlier gave a warm and hopeful speech after Arafat deliberately requested that Peres speak first. 32

Conclusion

Would mutual agreement to the Clinton Parameters have led to a final end of conflict agreement? There is no way to know, but the Palestinian rejection assured failure. Clinton, Barak, Prince Bandar and chief U.S. negotiator Ross, among others, all agree that Arafat’s rejection was a mistake of historic proportions, a “tragedy” according to Bandar. Clinton famously told Arafat “I am not a great man. I am a failure, and you have made me one.” 33 Ross concluded:

*Did we come close? Yes. Were the Palestinian negotiators ready to do the deal that was available? Yes. Did we ultimately fail because of the mistakes Barak made and the mistakes that Clinton made? No, each, regardless of his tactical mistakes, was ready to confront history and mythology. Only one leader was unable or unwilling to confront history and mythology: Yasir Arafat.* 34

The importance of the truth behind these events is demonstrated by Bandar’s recent interview. Why did Bandar bring the Clinton Parameters up now? Because of the transformations taking place in the Arab world, specifically the recent peace deals. Saudi Arabia endorsed these deals and even opened its airspace to Israeli airlines. It is widely believed that Saudi Arabia will normalize relations with Israel sometime soon. Some critics of the normalization deals argue that they neglect the needs of the Palestinians; that one of the key Palestinian bargaining chips has been taken away; that the Arabs abandoned the Palestinian cause. Indeed, Palestinians unleashed their wrath on the “normalizers” calling the moves a “stab in the back” and a “flagrant attack” on their rights. 35 The Saudis tired of the insults and decided to recount the tragic mistake by Arafat and the truth about long-standing Saudi support for the Palestinian cause.

What is beyond doubt is that Barak and the Israelis accepted Clinton’s Parameters and were ready to sign a definitive end of conflict agreement while Arafat and the Palestinians rejected the Parameters. Barak’s acceptance within the Parameters has been confirmed by the key players. Arafat’s rejection is well documented and recalled by all the major players cited above.

If the Americans made a mistake in the lead up to the negotiations, it was in their total inability to realize that the Palestinians saw all of their demands as literal and that they had no intention of budging one millimeter. How could anyone have expected a final peace agreement when the Palestinians refused to even acknowledge that there was a Jewish history in the Holy Land and insisted that a final agreement had to effectively allow for the creation of two majority Palestinians states? Thomas Friedman gave his take a few weeks after Clinton left office:

*[Barak] offered Mr. Arafat 94 percent of the West Bank for a Palestinian state, plus territorial compensation for most of the other 6 percent, plus half of Jerusalem, plus restitution and resettlement in Palestine for Palestinian refugees. And Mr. Arafat not only said no to all this, but described Israel as ‘fascist’ as Mr. Barak struggled for re-election. It would be as though de Gaulle had offered to withdraw from Algeria and the Algerians said: ‘Thank you. You’re a fascist. Of course we’ll take all of Algeria, but we won’t stop this conflict until we get Bordeaux, Marseilles and Nice as well.’* 36

Less discussed is that the constant coddling of the Palestinians, which allows then to make mistake after mistake, reject deal after deal, and has allowed the same behavior
to continue without consequences. As Ross explained recently in regards to Bandar’s comments how Arafat committed a “crime” in his rejection:

After Arafat rejected the Clinton parameters, other Arab officials echoed similar, if less dramatic, views to me. But none were prepared to say anything publicly. None were prepared openly to criticize the Arafat decision or counter the Palestinian story misrepresenting what had been offered. That was then—when the Palestinians could portray the diplomacy one way, and leading Arab figures would not challenge their story, even when they knew it was wrong. But this is now, and the Middle Eastern landscape is changing when it comes to the Palestinian cause. What was unthinkable before is no longer; the fear that Palestinians could arouse opposition to Arab leaders by claiming they were betraying Palestinian national aspirations is gone.

The Saudis and others did the Palestinians no favors. If Palestinian leaders never had to acknowledge their mistakes or account for why they missed opportunities, they were never going to learn lessons and adjust their behavior. But their negotiators knew. This past year, one former Palestinian negotiator, despairing about the current reality, wistfully said to me, “Can you imagine where we would be if we had accepted the Clinton parameters?”

Israel’s usual detractors have portrayed the recent peace deals with Arab nations as a step back in achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace. It’s the exact opposite—only when Palestinians are forced to accept reality and lose support for their maximalist positions will they be more likely to accept the compromise necessary for a final end of conflict deal. It does not appear they are moving in that direction any time soon. In fact, an October 28, 2020 Facebook posting on the Fatah Facebook page, representing President Mahmoud Abbas’ political party, denounced Israel’s normalization deals with maps of Palestine that include all of Israel—again making it clear that the Palestinians deny the existence of a Jewish state on any borders and remain wedded to their maximalist goals.

Arabic Text: Here we remain and we will not leave
How The Media Revised History of Arafat’s Rejectionism

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, revisionists reject or vastly downplay the fact that Arafat and the Palestinians rejected the Clinton Parameters and Barak, while the Israelis said yes, in an attempt to shift the blame on to Israel.

The media’s role in this historical revisionism is central: Although various media outlets reported Arafat’s rejection as clear-cut immediately after the events, however, soon afterwards the narrative shifted to one depicting the Palestinian response as more vague or that both sides equally rejected the Parameters through their reservations. Other narratives accept that Arafat rejected the Parameters but that the negotiations from start to finish were so flawed and stacked against the Palestinians that Arafat is ultimately not to blame for his rejection. More egregious reports repeat Arafat’s lie that the plan only granted Palestinians “Bantustans,” or geographically isolated “ethnic homelands” that evoke how blacks were treated in apartheid South Africa. Dennis Ross has pushed back on this canard as being particularly insulting; Ross noted that with 97% of the territory there would have been no cantons, no isolated or surrounded areas, and independent borders with Egypt and Jordan.

Today’s revisionism on Camp David and the Clinton Parameters is generally promoted by Western writers who “explain away” the Palestinian rejections and give Arafat full cover. It is a phenomenon which Einat Wilf, former Israeli Member of Parliament, has coined as “Westsplaining,” or the tendency of Western politicians, analysts and journalists to explain to the world what the Palestinians “really mean.”

In the context of the Parameters, Westsplaining says that even though the Palestinians in word and in writing make it continuously clear that they demand a “Right of Return” that literally allows all Palestinian refugees to enter Israel proper without restriction, they really don’t mean it this way; instead, the Palestinians understand that in practice there will be no mass migration of Palestinians into Israel and that their demand is primarily symbolic. There are many revisionist authors, but they generally all rely on a similar set of excuses to absolve Arafat, and they rarely quote Palestinian documents and officials who readily admit that they said no to the peace plans because they did not satisfy 100% of their demands. This article will review the key early revisionists, Robert Malley & Hussein Agha and Deborah Sontag. Most later revisionists cite these authors for their own theories.

Robert Malley & Hussein Agha

One of the first revisionist viewpoints was written by Robert Malley and Hussein Agha, who have collaborated and co-written numerous articles over the years. Malley was a member of the U.S. negotiating team at Camp David and special assistant for Arab-Israeli affairs to Clinton from 1998-2001, and thus holds credibility as an insider. However, Agha, a long-time advisor to the Palestinians for decades with both Arafat and Abbas, cannot be considered an impartial observer.

The key article by Malley & Agha was published in August 2001, several months after the negotiations ended. The authors fault the Americans and Israelis for the failure of the negotiations, recounting a long list of faults and errors which served to undercut Arafat and the Palestinians. They agree that the settlement put forward by Clinton in December 2000 “showed that the distance traveled since Camp David was indeed considerable, and almost all in the Palestinians’ direction.” They write the following regarding the Parameters:

Unlike at Camp David, and as shown both by the time it took him to react and by the ambiguity of his reactions, Arafat thought hard before providing his response. But in the end, many of the features that troubled him in July
came back to haunt him in December. As at Camp David, Clinton was not presenting the terms of a final deal, but rather “Parameters” within which accelerated, final negotiations were to take place. As at Camp David, Arafat felt under pressure, with both Clinton and Barak announcing that the ideas would be off the table—would “depart with the President”—unless they were accepted by both sides. With only thirty days left in Clinton’s presidency and hardly more in Barak’s premiership, the likelihood of reaching a deal was remote at best; if no deal could be made, the Palestinians feared they would be left with principles that were detailed enough to supersede international resolutions yet too fuzzy to constitute an agreement.

In this narrative, the simple unwillingness to accept the terms did not factor into the rejection. Without explicitly saying so, the authors also acknowledge that Arafat did not say yes to Clinton: “All told, Arafat preferred to continue negotiating under the comforting umbrella of international resolutions rather than within the confines of America’s uncertain proposals.” Malley & Agha thus accept the basic truth of Barak’s “yes” and Arafat’s effective “no,” but offer a multitude of subjective reasons why the Palestinians cannot be faulted (e.g. pressure on Arafat). The authors misrepresent the Palestinian position on “Right of Return” stating: “While insisting on the Palestinian refugees’ right to return to homes lost in 1948, [the Palestinians] were prepared to tie this right to a mechanism of implementation providing alternative choices for the refugees while limiting the numbers returning to Israel proper.” In fact, Arafat’s letter to Clinton and other internal documents show that the Palestinian position was an absolute literal interpretation of the Right of Return based on UN Resolution 194, and any Israeli ability to limit or block this right was unacceptable. Malley & Agha were not aware of the perspective of Prince Bandar, which was first revealed in 2003; Bandar contradicts many of their key points.

Dennis Ross responded to Malley & Agha, disputing many of their assertions. Ross states: “Both Barak and Clinton were prepared to do what was necessary to reach agreement. Both were up to the challenge. Neither shied away from the risks inherent in confronting history and mythology. Can one say the same about Arafat? Unfortunately, not…” Ross concludes: “It is not, as Abba Eban said, that the Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. It is that in always feeling victimized they fall back on blaming everyone else for their predicament. It is never their fault. History may not have been kind or fair to the Palestinians. They have suffered and been betrayed by others. They are, surely, the weakest player with the fewest cards to play. But by always blaming others, they never have to focus on their own mistakes.”

Malley & Agha responded to Ross, arguing that even if Arafat did not respond affirmatively to a final deal, his responses were justified due to a long list of process errors, American mistakes and Israeli attitudes. They write: “Our article does not assign blame or catalog each side’s respective mistakes. Rather, it shows how the historical context and conduct of the negotiations shaped the parties’ attitudes and effectively undermined the possibility of a deal.” In essence, they argue that it does not matter who exactly said yes or no, since the process itself was so flawed that no deal could have been reached and no one can be blamed. Malley & Agha acknowledge that the Palestinians made serious mistakes, “But the question is not whether Arafat made mistakes, or whether these were justified. The question is whether his behavior can be explained by factors other than his presumed inability to put an end to the conflict. A close scrutiny of events, we believe, shows that it can.” The co-authors once again fall back on nebulous reasons for Arafat’s rejection but cannot bring themselves to evaluate the actual Parameters and analyze why they were not good enough for the Palestinians.

In a subsequent exchange of responses between Malley & Agha and Ehud Barak & Benny Morris, the latter summarized their view of the revisionist thinking: “Robert Malley and Hussein Agha still don’t get it (or pretend they don’t). And it’s really very simple—Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton put on the table during July—December 2000 a historic compromise and the Palestinians rejected...”
it. They concede that Barak’s offer at Camp David was ‘unprecedented’ and that the upgraded (Clinton) proposals offered the Palestinians 94—96 percent of the West Bank, 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, a sovereign Palestinian state, an end to the occupation, the uprooting of most of the settlements, and sovereignty over Arab East Jerusalem—and Arafat and his aides still rejected the deal and pressed on with their terrorist onslaught.

Yet Malley and Agha continue, in effect, to blame Israel for the descent into war while producing ‘a smokescreen,’ in Barak’s phrase, of sophistry and misleading nit-picking, that aims to get their man off the hook. Permeating their response is that shopsoiled Palestinian Weltanschauung, that someone else, always, is to blame for their misfortunes—Ottoman Turks, British Mandate officials, Zionists, Americans, anyone but themselves.

Malley & Agha offer a weak reply that does not address Arafat’s refusal but attacks Barak’s shortcomings as a leader and concludes in their last sentence by again placing the onus on Israel (no demands are placed on the Palestinians), asking if Barak can “let us know what are his specific proposals for a final peace agreement with the Palestinians”—as if the Parameters that Barak agreed to did not already do exactly that.

Deborah Sontag

Deborah Sontag, a prominent writer for The New York Times who also served as their Jerusalem bureau chief, wrote a long piece in July 2001 about the peace process, a few months after they ended. Like Malley & Agha, Sontag does not dispute the facts: Barak accepted the Parameters and Arafat did not. However, she grants Arafat a “free pass” citing more than twenty reasons why the process was flawed and how the Israelis and Americans erred, so it’s not reasonable to have expected Arafat to say yes. Sontag also offers this explanation why Arafat said no to the Parameters:

The proposal offered more to the Palestinians than what was on the table at Camp David, but [the Palestinians] initially responded with skepticism. The plan was too vague, they said. In the midst once more of a violent relationship with Israel, they were not emotionally poised to abide by the political timetables of others and to rush into a fuzzy deal, they said.

Sontag acknowledges Arafat’s rejection but remarkably absolves Arafat from accepting a sovereign nation for the Palestinians with the wishy-washy reasoning that he was not “emotionally poised” to make deal. Of course Sontag does not quote Palestinian documents or negotiators who readily admit that not obtaining 100% of their demands was the real reason they said no—not the long list of subjective factors cited by Sontag. Sontag also had no idea about Bandar’s comments or details of the negotiations recounted later by Dennis Ross and Bill Clinton, all of which gut her arguments.

Instead of letting Arafat off the hook, Sontag should have instead echoed Israeli negotiator Shlomo Ben-Ami’s view: “In a situation like this the only chance of a Palestinian leader with vision who wants to reach an agreement with us is to say a loud yes. Not to stutter, not to mumble. To say a ringing yes. If Arafat had said a ringing yes at the end of December he would have saved the Barak government and saved the peace.”

Aaron David Miller

Aaron David Miller acted as the State Department’s deputy Middle East coordinator for negotiations and was one of the U.S. negotiators at Camp David. In July 2020 Miller wrote a retrospective on the peace talks. While Miller offers perhaps more balance than the previous authors and states the facts correctly, he also absolves Arafat for his rejection. His first comments reveal his thinking, and most of the article recounts all sorts of problems why Arafat could not say yes—but once again nothing is discussed
about the maximalist positions held by the Palestinians. Israel and the U.S. were primarily at fault in Miller’s recollection:

*The Camp David summit—ill-conceived and ill-advised—should probably never have taken place. It did only because Barak, fresh from repeated failures in negotiations with Syria, wanted to use the last six months of Clinton’s term either to reach a deal with Arafat or expose him as an unreliable partner... Arafat, who was in no hurry to reach any kind of agreement, had warned us in June that a premature summit might lead to an explosion.*

However, Miller acknowledges Arafat’s rejection of the Parameters:

*In December 2000, shortly before leaving office, Clinton would put on the table a set of negotiating parameters far closer to what might have been a basis for a serious negotiation. Had we done this at the summit, the outcome might have been different. But given where we were in July, Clinton would never have offered such parameters; Barak would never accepted them; and more than likely—as he did that December—Arafat simply would have said no, or nothing at all.*

**A Guide for Revisionists**

After reviewing numerous revisionist and “Arafat apologist” narratives I have compiled a list of reasons cited for the failure of the peace talks, except of course anything the Palestinians might have done or not done. This list can be used as a guide for future revisionists.

None of these reasons actually explain why Arafat could not have said yes on December 27, 2000. Arafat faced no downside from saying yes—unless the Parameters were in fact not deemed sufficient, and from their own admissions, the Palestinians were not prepared to accept anything less than 100% of their demands. If Arafat accepted and Israel could not later deliver, then Arafat would be the acknowledged peacemaker and the Israelis at fault. What Arafat was truly more concerned about is that if he said yes, it would actually result in an end to the conflict and his lifelong role as an international revolutionary. The revisionists do not want to accept this very simple truth. [46]

A recent set of Twitter posts between Martin Indyk and Gerard Araud, former French Ambassador to Israel, summarizes the proper response to the Arafat apologists. Araud, taking the standard revisionist view, echoing Malley & Agha’s “pressure” that Arafat was under, wrote: “Asking Arafat to make concessions in a century-old conflict under the pressure of a lame duck US president when negotiating with a lame duck Israeli PM didn’t make sense. His reaction to wait for the next US and Israeli interlocutors was logical.” [47] (Araud ignores that Bandar specifically told Arafat that he had broad Arab support and that incoming President Bush would honor any signed deal.) [48]

Indyk replied: “That’s true but the Israeli Cabinet’s acceptance was clear cut and Barak’s reservations were within Clinton’s parameters. Arafat’s purposeful ambiguity was as much a rejection as Abu Mazen’s refusal to answer Obama’s proposals. They had their reasons but they both ran away.”

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Guide for the Revisionists—How to Let Arafat “Off the Hook”

Barak & Israeli Failures

- Barak focused on peace with Syria first ignoring and insulting the Palestinians
- Barak reneged on earlier confidence building measures such as withdrawing from three villages
- Israel’s earlier and unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon weakened Arafat’s ability to make a deal
- Barak was a weak leader and it was not believed he could get a deal done
- Barak was expected to lose the elections and was effectively a lame duck leader
- Barak doomed Camp David by cutting short the preparatory session
- Barak halted critical pre-summit negotiations fearing leaks would ruin his coalition government
- Barak’s negotiating style was condescending
- Barak had a “bunker mentality” and refused to meet with Arafat
- Barak humiliated Arafat
- Barak had an obnoxious personality and did not know how to deal with people
- Barak took an all-or-nothing approach to the negotiations which put too much pressure on the talks
- Barak had no strategy in how to deal with the Palestinians
- Barak was not as generous as typically portrayed
- Israel continued to build settlements even during the peace process
- Barak brought settler representatives into his coalition angering the Palestinians
- Barak blamed Syria for the breakdown of peace talks and planned to similarly blame the Palestinians
- Barak planned to expose Arafat as an unreliable partner

American Failures

- The timing of the talk was ill conceived by the U.S.
- The Americans pushed Arafat into Camp David even though he didn’t really want to do it
- The Americans did not properly manage or supervise the negotiations
- The Americans did not truly understand Palestinians’ needs
- The Americans discussed everything with Israel first, ignoring the Palestinians
- The Americans were basically a mouthpiece of the Israelis, American ideas were really Israeli ones
- The Camp David summit was rushed
- The peace negotiations started too late and on the wrong footing
- The peace negotiations were set up to weaken and/or trap the Palestinians into a corner
- The Americans should have held high-level pre-summit negotiations
- The goal of Camp David was in reality to rescue Barak politically back home
- The Americans did not appreciate the pressure on the Palestinians from the Muslim world
- The Americans praised Barak and the Israelis to help Al Gore’s presidential run
- The U.S. had never been an honest broker and did not prove it could be one now
- The U.S. did not prepare its Arab allies for Palestinian concessions
- U.S. negotiators were too pro-Israel and did not include Arabists
- U.S. negotiators focused on the younger Palestinian negotiators and not Arafat
- U.S. negotiators tried to divide and weaken the Palestinian negotiating team
- Most of the negotiations were held orally without enough placed in writing
- Clinton was a lame duck president and lost his credibility to get a deal done
- The Camp David and Clinton Parameters were too vague
- The Clinton Parameters should have been presented earlier
- Stating that the Parameters would be off the table if not accepted was a mistake
- The Americans were not tough enough on either side
- The continued violence on the ground limited the chances for a successful deal
- The negotiations were a failure of psychology and process
- The offers were never written

**Limitations Placed on Palestinians**

- The Palestinians did not have sufficient time to prepare for the talks
- Arafat was “trapped” by the peace process
- Arafat could not be expected to end a century old conflict under pressure
- Arafat came to Camp David simply to survive, not make a deal
- Arafat felt ignored by Israel and Barak
- The Palestinians did not get assurances of wider Arab support
- The Palestinians did not have the authority to make decisions on behalf of all Muslims
• The Palestinians were held hostage to Clinton’s need to improve his legacy
• The Palestinians were held hostage to Barak’s need to improve his election prospects
• The Palestinians were forced to hold talks with Barak who was expected to lose election
• The Palestinians were forced to hold talks with Clinton even though his time in office was ending
• The Palestinians did not understand the implications of a victory by Ariel Sharon
• The Palestinians did not realize that President Bush would honor prior agreements
• The Palestinians were not emotionally prepared to rush into a fuzzy deal
• The Palestinians told the Americans that without proper preparation Camp David would fail
• The Palestinians came to Camp David so reluctantly that failure should have been foreseen
• The Palestinians were not given the opportunity to contact Arab leaders to discuss negotiations
• The timing was poor because of Arafat’s plummeting domestic approval ratings
• The Palestinians believe that they were being manipulated by the Americans
• The Palestinians felt that agreeing to a vague deal would supersede international resolutions

Revisionists Should Not Mention:
• The Parameters offered everything the West seemed to believe the Palestinians wanted, including an independent state on nearly 100% of the West Bank and Gaza with a connecting road, East Jerusalem as their capital with control over the Temple Mount, and a formula for the “Right of Return” that would not effectively convert Israel into a majority Arab state.

• Numerous documents and interviews, at the time and since, showing that the Palestinians wholly rejected any formulation of “Right of Return” that did no literally allow refugees to enter Israel back to their “homes” without Israel being able to block these migrations.

• Admissions by leading Palestinians negotiators and figures that they had no intention of negotiating as they saw Israel responsible for everything that had befallen the Palestinians.

• Arafat and the Palestinians had the full backing of the Arab states, with direct endorsement and encouragement to accept the Parameters by Prince Bandar and the Egyptian Ambassador literally hours before Arafat was supposed to meet with Clinton.

• Arafat was given assurances by Prince Bandar that President Bush would honor any agreement that a prior president, in this case Clinton, formally signed.

• Arafat egregiously dismissed Jewish history in the Holy Land by claiming that no Jewish temple ever existed on the Temple Mount. This was part of a long standing pattern, that remains active today, of denying any Jewish history in the Holy Land and is effectively a refusal to acknowledge any claim that Jews deserve sovereignty in any borders.
• Despite possible flaws in the process or snubs by Barak and the Israelis, at the very end in December 2000 Arafat had a deal in hand that he could have said yes to.

• All the key participants in the negotiations, excluding Israelis and Palestinians, agree that the Palestinians said no to the Parameters and the Israelis said yes, such as President Clinton, Chief U.S. negotiator Dennis Ross and a leading Saudi representative, Prince Bandar.

• Prince Bandar called Arafat's refusal a “crime” and a “tragedy” and does not believe Arafat had any good reason to say no.

Endnotes


2 Dennis Ross explains, “Negotiations could take place within the Parameters, but not on the Parameters themselves. If either side could not accept the Parameters, [Clinton] would withdraw the ideas...he told each side they would have five days to respond with either a yes or no. A nonanswer would be taken as a no. A maybe would be taken as a no.” (p. 751) Ross adds: “We had done what we could. Both sides had asked for an American proposal; they had gotten it. It was the best we could do. Now they faced their moments of truth.” (p. 753)


5 Clinton Parameters, p. 2. Shlomo Ben-Ami, a member of the Israeli team, explained: “We sent the Americans a document of several pages containing our reservations. But as far as I recall, they were pretty minor and dealt mainly with security arrangements and deployment areas and control over the passages. There was also clarification concerning our sovereignty over the Temple Mount.” Haaretz, “The day peace died,” Interview with Ari Shavit, September 14, 2001; https://webhome.weizmann.ac.il/home/comartin/israel/ben-am.html

6 Sher, Gilead. The Israeli-Palestinians Peace Negotiations, 1999-2001, Within Reach; Routledge, London & New York, 2006. P. 202-203 (Kindle version). Shlomo Ben-Ami, also a member of the Israeli team, wrote this account: “The proposal was difficult for us to accept. No one came out dancing and singing, and Ehud especially was perturbed. At the same time, three days later, the cabinet decided on a positive response to Clinton. All the ministers supported it, with the exception of Matan Vilnai and Ra‘anan Cohen. I informed the Americans that Israel’s answer was yes.”

7 Ross, Dennis. The Missing Peace; p. 754-755

8 Clinton, Bill. My Life. Knopf, 2004; p. 759-60


Hasan’s only “evidence” are the comments by Siewert & Boucher in press conferences on January 3rd stating that Arafat had accepted the parameters and Clinton saying the same at the Israel Policy Forum on January 7th. This does not support Hasan’s assertion as discussed above in the section “Aftermath.”


13 Ross, Dennis. The Missing Peace; p. 755


15 Ross, Dennis. The Missing Peace; p. 756


17 The Palestine Authority, Legal Unit, Negotiation Support Unit; Memorandum Re: President Clinton's Proposals, January 2, 2001; PDF accessed at transparency.aljazeera.net


19 Martin Indyk comments posted on Twitter, October 12, 2020; https://twitter.com/Martin_Indyk/status/1315730371566289472
The Camp David Papers, originally written in Arabic, was published in Al-Ayyan newspaper in a series between July 29 and August 10, 2000


For the first time in the history of the conflict the American president put on the table a proposal, based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, very close to the Palestinian demands, and Arafat refused even to accept it as a basis for negotiations, walked out of the room, and deliberately turned to terrorism. That’s the real story—all the rest is gossip. “See Benny Morris, The New York Review, “Camp David and After: An Exchange, 1. An Interview with Arafat.”

Full video of the Davos session where Arafat and Peres spoke is available on C-Span, https://www.c-span.org/video/?162431-1/peace-process

The true story is that... Clinton was devastated. He continued yelling at Arafat. “Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Chairman. When my Messiah Jesus Christ walked on the Temple Mount, he didn’t see any Mosques. He didn’t see Al-Aqsa. He didn’t see the Dome of the Rock. He saw only the Jewish Temple!” Clinton was up in arms. He became angry and raised his voice: “Never a Jewish Temple? Mr. Chairman, do you mean to tell me that my Bible is wrong?”

The parties and all the leaders “made clear they thought Clinton’s ideas were historic, and they pledged to press Arafat underground. “ Clinton was up in arms. He became angry and raised his voice: “Never a Jewish Temple? Mr. Chairman, do you mean to tell me that my Bible is wrong?” Clinton was devastated. He continued yelling at Arafat. “Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Chairman. When my Messiah Jesus Christ walked on the Temple Mount, he didn’t see any Mosques. He didn’t see Al-Aqsa. He didn’t see the Dome of the Rock. He saw only the Jewish Temple!”

According to Barak, Clinton, when hearing about Deborah Sontag’s list of reasons why the negotiations failed, said: “What the hell is this? Why is she turning the mistakes we [i.e., the US and Israel] made into the essence? The true story of Camp David was that for the first time in the history of the conflict the American president put on the table a proposal, based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, very close to the Palestinian demands, and Arafat refused even to accept it as a basis for negotiations, walked out of the room, and deliberately turned to terrorism. That’s the real story—all the rest is gossip.” See Benny Morris, The New York Review, “Camp David and After: An Exchange. (1. An Interview with Ehud Barak), June 13, 2000; https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/06/13/camp-david-and-after-an-exchange-1-an-interview-wi/

Twitter posts by @GerardAraud, October 13, 2020 4:26AM and @Martin_Indyk, October 13, 2020 4:26AM.

Prince Bandar and Dennis Ross corroborate broad Arab support. Dennis Ross explained that the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia were made aware of the Parameters on the same day they were narrated to the parties and all the leaders “made clear they thought Clinton’s ideas were historic, and they pledged to press Arafat to accept the plan.” (Ross, Dennis. Foreign Policy, “Think Again: Yasir Arafat,” November 11, 2009; https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/think-again-yasir-rafat/