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THE U.S. AGENDA AT THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN SUMMIT

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President Bill Clinton today is hosting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for talks designed to revive the stalemated peace negotiations begun in Oslo, Norway, in 1993. The goal of the summit, to be held at the Wye Plantation conference center in eastern Maryland, is to conclude an interim agreement on Israeli withdrawal from parts of the disputed West Bank and clear the way for talks to reach a final settlement of outstanding Israeli-Palestinian issues.

Netanyahu and Arafat made limited progress in negotiations held on the Gaza-Israel border last week when they agreed in principle to an American proposal for an Israeli troop withdrawal from a further 13 percent of the West Bank, in addition to the 27 percent of that disputed territory that Arafat's Palestinian Authority already controls. But much remains to be done on security arrangements, the question of further troop withdrawals, the opening of the Gaza airport, arrangements for Palestinian safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, the extradition of Palestinian terrorists to Israel, and the release of Palestinian prisoners by Israel.

The Wye Plantation summit has been compared to the 1978 U.S.-sponsored Camp David summit that advanced Israeli-Egyptian peace negotiations, but there are important differences between the two meetings. Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat's electrifying trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 already had earned him the confidence of many Israelis.

Arafat has fueled Israeli mistrust by violating his Oslo security commitments, using inflammatory rhetoric to incite violence, and using terrorism and civil violence as a negotiating tactic. Recently, Arafat threatened to declare the independence of a Palestinian state if Israel fails to agree to his negotiating demands by May 4, 1999—the target date for reaching a final settlement under the Oslo agreements. He also has refused to amend the Palestinian Covenant, the charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to eliminate calls for Israel's destruction, despite having agreed to do so in the 1993 Oslo agreement, the 1995 Oslo II agreement, and the 1997 Hebron protocol.

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The Wye Plantation summit also will be different on the Israeli side. At Camp David, Prime Minister Menachem Begin was accompanied by Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, who served as moderating influences on the Israeli negotiating position. Netanyahu will be accompanied by newly appointed Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, one of the most hawkish members of his cabinet. Sharon's endorsement would make it

easier for the Prime Minister to pursue negotiations without risking defections from his coalition that could topple his government. Moreover, Sharon has a pragmatic streak. As Defense Minister in 1982, he evicted Israeli settlers from the Sinai settlement of Yamit in compliance with the 1979 Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty.

The U.S. Role. The chief obstacle to a stable Israeli–Palestinian peace is Palestinian terrorism, not Israel's understandable reluctance to surrender more territory that could be used to launch terrorist attacks. More Israelis have been killed in the five years since the Oslo agreement was signed on the White House lawn than in the entire decade before the agreement. The Oslo process promised “land for peace” but has degenerated into “land for promises” which too often go unfulfilled. Arafat's failure to halt persistent terrorism led Israelis to elect Netanyahu as Prime Minister in 1996 based on his platform of “peace with security.” In light of Arafat's poor record of complying with his Oslo commitments, it would be a mistake for Netanyahu to accept anything less than ironclad security arrangements.

At the Wye Plantation negotiations, the Clinton Administration should:

- **Insist that Arafat comply fully with his Oslo commitments.** Washington should stress that Israel has no reason to negotiate future agreements if Arafat continues to violate past agreements. The U.S. should demand that Arafat clamp down on radical Palestinian groups opposed to the peace negotiations; end his “revolving door” policy of arresting terrorists under American pressure only to release them quietly a short time later; extradite known terrorists to Israel; purge the PLO's National Covenant of calls for Israel's destruction; and halt his inflammatory rhetoric, including calls for a holy war to liberate Jerusalem and praise of suicide bombers as “martyrs.”

- **Minimize U.S. diplomatic intervention to allow the two sides to negotiate directly with each other as much as possible.** Overly eager American meddling will lead both sides to negotiate primarily with Washington rather than each other and diminish the long-term prospects for peace.
- **Warn Arafat against unilaterally declaring a Palestinian state.** Hillary Clinton's May 6 statement that Palestinian statehood would be in the “long term interests of the Middle East” has reduced the perceived costs of such a declaration. President Clinton should publicly voice his unequivocal opposition to a unilateral declaration of statehood as a violation of the Oslo accords and warn Arafat that the U.S. would press other countries not to recognize Arafat's unacceptable claim.

The Oslo process has become mired in the details of an interim agreement before coming to grips with the more contentious final status issues concerning Palestinian statehood, demarcation of borders, permanent security arrangements, the fate of Palestinian refugees, the status of Israeli settlements, the future of Jerusalem, and the disposition of scarce water resources. It is unrealistic to expect these disputes to be resolved by May 4, 1999, regardless of what happens at this week's summit. The U.S. therefore should work with Israelis and Palestinians to extend the negotiating timetable.

Ultimately, however, a final settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict can be reached only if the Palestinian Authority complies fully with its past agreements. The Clinton Administration must use the Wye Plantation summit to drive home this point to Yasser Arafat.

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