

[Home](#) [Opinion](#)

It must be asked: What if the peace talks fail?

To encourage the progress and success of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, John Kerry - and the rest of us - must take into account the worst case scenario.

By Shaul Arieli | Aug. 25, 2013 | 2:38 AM

Tweet

Both the Israelis and Palestinians have low expectations and high suspicions regarding the resumption of peace talks between them. But anyone who thinks an arrangement is better than the continuation of the existing situation must see the meetings between the sides as an achievement of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and encourage the participants and brokers to turn them into effective negotiations over the core issues.

Precisely for this purpose – to enable success to forge its own way – we must take into account the worst case scenario. Kerry, Martin Indyk (the U.S. envoy for Israeli-Palestinian talks) and their people must remember that, beside the chance for glory and strengthening the United States' status, there's also a risk of failure. To minimize it, they must understand the significance of laying the blame for the talks' breakdown on either one or both parties, and/or on the mediators.

If the talks fail, Kerry will be accountable to President Barack Obama and the American public. He will be required to explain why he invested his time and energy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rather than in other acute problems like North Korea, Iran or the economic crisis in Europe. But mainly, he'll have to explain the failure of his Middle East policy in view of the fluctuations in the Arab world.

If the talks fail, Kerry will also have to explain to the Europeans why, in the past year, he demanded that the European Union refrain from initiatives to settle the conflict or from intervening in the negotiations, although the European states have been financing the Palestinian Authority for two decades and investing their money in economic enterprises in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Above all, Kerry will owe the parties themselves an explanation. If he thinks the Palestinians are to blame, the result will be another American veto on Palestine's bid to become a UN member.

Laying blame for the failure on the Palestinians will make it clear to the Palestinian public why some people in Israel's leadership and public don't distinguish between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas, seeing them all as an identical group that doesn't want peace.

If the failure is accompanied by the Palestinians' resorting to violence, the Palestinian public will have to bear the brunt of an Israeli military retaliation, while watching the contributions and grants from Europe and the United States dwindle.

On the other hand, if Kerry thinks the Israelis are to blame, it will be the Israeli public that will have to understand why the European Union implements decisions that harm the Israeli economy, and why the United States doesn't stop Palestine from becoming a UN member and doesn't block legal suits against Israelis at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The Israeli public will no longer be able to blame the instability in the Arab world when Egyptian and Jordanian people demand to revoke their peace agreements with Israel. It will have to see how Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas reconciles with Hamas, which will declare again that "there's no partner" and that "Israel understands only force."

Perhaps Kerry will lay the blame on both sides. In this case, as difficult and painful as the notion is, Kerry must not abandon the region, telling the sides to give the White House a call when they're tired of counting their dead. He will have to tell them clearly what the conditions for a future arrangement are, and the possible solutions to all the contested issues. If they refuse to accept them, he will have to present them to the UN Security Council instead.

Such a move will mean replacing all the UN resolutions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with an international American-European position, which will be imposed on both sides.

It seems that only an orderly thinking process like that, which clearly foresees the failure, could lead all those involved in these meetings to the success so many yearn for.

Accepting the possibility of failure is the first step toward making progress in the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.