

In reality, though, “Washington probably would not like the governments Arab democracy would produce,” Gause says. Rather than push for free elections to be held soon in the Arab world, concludes

Gause, the United States should encourage the growth of “secular, nationalist, and liberal political organizations that could compete on an equal footing with Islamist parties.”

Of Maps and Men

“Lessons From the Swiss Cheese Map” by Shari Motro, in *Legal Affairs*
(Sept.–Oct. 2005), 254 Elm St., New Haven, Conn. 06511.

The day before Yasir Arafat was due to sign the interim agreement at the Oslo II peace talks in September 1995, Israeli negotiators presented him with the infamous “swiss cheese” map of the West Bank as it would be altered by the agreement. “These are cantons!” the Palestinian leader shouted. “You want me to accept cantons! You want to *destroy* me!” He stormed out of the room.

After a further concession by Israel, Arafat did sign the agreement, but his Palestinian critics pointed again and again to the so-called swiss cheese map, as they excoriated him for capitulating to Israel. It was a dramatic illustration of the little-appreciated power of mapmaking.

While the negotiators had spent weeks meticulously working out the text of Oslo II, the map Arafat saw was produced almost as an afterthought. Nobody knows that better than Motro, who was then an Israeli soldier assigned to the talks as a translator. Late one night, her commanding officer took her to a room on an army base with large fluorescent-lit tables and piles of maps. “He handed me some dried-out markers, unfurled a map I had never seen before, and directed me to trace certain lines and shapes. Just make them clearer, he said. No cartographer was present, no graphic designer weighed in on my choices, and, when I was through, no [attorney] reviewed my work. No one knew it mattered.”

And so the official map accompanying the agreement that provided for Israel’s first significant withdrawal from the West Bank had dozens of bright yellow blotches for areas under joint Israeli-Palestinian control and eight brown blotches for areas

under Palestinian control. The map seemed to suggest that the remaining three-fourths of the West Bank would remain permanently in Israeli hands.

“Maps record facts but, whether by design or by accident, they also project worldviews and function as arguments,” says Motro, who is now a law professor at the University of Richmond and a senior fellow at Empax, a think tank in New York studying the role of graphics in peacemaking. “Every map reflects a set of judgments that influence the viewer’s impression of the underlying data. The choice of colors and labels, the cropping, and the process of selecting what gets included and what gets left out all combine to form a visual gestalt.” The three-fourths of the West Bank left for the time being in Israeli hands by Oslo II, for instance, could have been rendered in a color that linked it to Israel or the Palestinian-controlled areas, or it could have been given its own distinctive color, indicating that its future was still to be determined. “A skilled designer can make peace seem inevitable or impossible, reassuring or terrifying, logical or jumbled.”

After the Oslo “peace process” fell apart in 2001, only one of the proposed peace plans, the Geneva Accord, included maps. When Motro saw them, she says, “my heart sank,” for they were “filled with chartjunk, arbitrary colors and labels, inconsistencies, and omissions,” obscuring “the simple reassuring elegance of the agreement’s proposed solution.”

The lesson isn’t limited to the Middle East. Negotiators around the world, says Motro, must realize that a good map is worth a thousand words.