

THE ROADMAP: CAN IT LEAD TO ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE?

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The Roadmap:¹ Can It Lead To Arab-Israeli Peace?

The Iraq War has ended while a Middle East transformation awaits the Palestinian-Israeli conflict's resolution. The time may be ripe. Because a strategic threat to Israel's existence has been eliminated, many believe that the United States' success in Iraq creates a fresh window of opportunity to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. After experiencing more than two years of the conflict's worst violence, Palestinians and Israelis have accepted the Performance Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict (Roadmap). Sharon, Israel's Prime Minister dominates Israeli political life and has the clout to make, as he likes to call them, "painful concessions." Mahmoud Abbas, the new Palestinian Prime Minister, is spearheading the Palestinian Authority's reform and sharing Yasser Arafat's power, a condition that Palestinians believed gives them the leverage to forge peace with Israel.² The Bush Administration recognizes the centrality of the Palestinian question to regional stability and Arab-Israeli relations and, therefore, is vigorously promoting the Roadmap. These are all positive developments that the international community seeks to capitalize on. By comparing the Roadmap's approach to the Oslo peace process, this essay identifies the new peace initiative's positive and negative components.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict enters a critical phase at a time when (1) there is no state balance to American power and (2) transnational actors have risen to challenge states in terms of the damage they can do. These international realities were magnified after the events of September 11, when, in response, the United States waged war first on Afghanistan and then Iraq. The two wars sent a clear message to Palestinians that violence is futile, a message the United States wants the whole world to understand in its war on terrorism. However, along with language of force, the United States is speaking regional cooperation and mutual benefit.

The United States has a Middle East vision. President Bush has stated, "Reform is taking hold in many societies that are eager to join in the progress and prosperity of our times. I urge nations throughout the region to open their markets, to seek broader trade in the world and to join us in creating a US-Middle East free trade area within a decade." This vision finds Arab support. President Mubarak, for example, has mentioned that Egypt is continuing its "important endeavors to political, economic, and social reforms" and welcomed "the initiative by the United States to open new economic opportunities for all the people in the Middle East." The idea is that peace would permit Arabs and Israelis to engage in joint commercial activity of mutual benefit, and later increased economic activity would lead to interdependence that enhances Israeli-Arab relations. This approach serves the United States' war on terrorism by helping to decrease economic and technological gaps between Arabs and the West while also making Arabs more *likeminded*. However, the United States realizes that a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a prerequisite to such regional cooperation and peace.

¹ The Roadmap has been offered to the Palestinians and Israelis by the United States, European Union, United Nations, and Russia (the Quartet) to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which the Parties have accepted it (with Israel making 14 reservations on it), consisting of a three three-phased approach. Phase I focuses primarily on security performance and ending the violence, but also addresses the current Palestinian humanitarian crisis, building Palestinian Public Institutions, developing a civil society, and deals with the issue of settlements. Phase II entitled, "Transition," centers on "the option of creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty." Phase III aspires a permanent status agreement and an end to the conflict by establishing an independent, viable, Palestinian state through bilateral negotiations. With regard to further positive developments, it worth mentioning that the United States owes Toni Blair to try to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict because of his unrelenting support during the Iraq War.

² This power redistribution has satisfied the international community who are ready to weigh in its influence and exact change.

A Middle East that does not threaten American domestic security and its regional interests begins and ends with resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although the hawks in Bush's administration may believe that the swift US victory in the war on Iraq has made the Palestinian-Israeli conflict less of a strategic concern, Arabs and their governments have no choice but to remain skeptical of regional *rapprochement* while Israel's occupation continues to deny Palestinians their human dignity. Arab-Israeli relations cannot survive the daily demolition of Palestinian homes, the killing of children, and the witnessing of an entire people--their people--under siege. The return of the Palestinian question as a key issue in Middle East politics after the Iraq war attests to this. Therefore, with the "two-state" solution and a Roadmap, the United States administration has begun tackling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, engaging both Parties to the extent that it is micro-managing the conflict. The ultimate objective is an "independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state living along side by side in peace and security with Israel and its neighbors."

A Palestinian state fits the United State's overall regional vision after the War and September 11. The Roadmap proposes a framework that the United States and the international community as whole endorse. Along with fostering a vision where Middle Eastern states adhere to liberalism wholeheartedly in organizing socioeconomic and political life, the Roadmap comes with a modified approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, promising a Palestinian state with provisional borders in 2003, and full Statehood by 2005.

The Roadmap takes the approach that since there is an objective consensus that a State of Palestine will be created, let us do it now, so that we can continue to actively change the Middle East in a way that will spark change in other Arab countries. Economic cooperation will have the effect of strengthening ties where they exist and creating trust where trust is lacking. Palestine can also, potentially, benefit from early statehood by beginning to build its devastated economy that has been under siege since 2000, when the second Palestinian intifada broke out. In this regional and international context, the essay explores the Roadmap's substance and procedure that aims to build on the US's recent successes in the region.

The Roadmap maintains the same basis for achieving a Palestinian-Israeli settlement as Oslo: Land for Peace and an end of the occupation that began in 1967. The Roadmap provides that "the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, UNSCRs 242, 338, and 1397, agreements previously reached by the parties, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah." This is a positive aspect of the Roadmap, because beginning with Netanyahu in 1996, after President Rabin was assassinated; Israel has attempted to redefine the Palestinian question. The Palestinian Question went from an occupation problem to a land dispute (hence the Land for Peace formula) in Oslo, and, after September 11, Sharon has pushed relentlessly to make the Palestinian question a terrorism problem, where the new formula for peace would be: Security for Peace *instead of* Land for Peace. In other words, Palestinians would offer Israel security in exchange for peace, instead of Israel offering Palestinians land in exchange for peace.

It should be noted in each definitional moment Palestinians have lost rights. In each one of those moments, Palestinians compromised certain national aspirations. In each one of those moments, resolving the Palestinian Question became more distant, and the prospect of achieving just and lasting peace more daunting. Israel's exploitation of its great bargaining power (and the support of the world's lone Superpower) has contributed to Israel's inability to recognize that an equitable peace (if not a just one) caters to its best interests. Re-defining the Palestinian question would have changed not only which party shoulders the initial burden or has the moral upper hand, but also more importantly, what Israel provides in return for Palestinians to stop violence would be contingent on Palestinian performance providing for Israel's security. Although the Roadmap

avoids this pitfall, it does strike a compromise that threatens the Roadmap's success by adopting Israel's stance to have progress contingent on Palestinians *successfully* curtailing violence and acting decisively against terror.

America's anti-terrorism stance,³ which dictates no compromise with terror, influences the security requirements the Roadmap imposes on Palestinians. Both Israel and the United States are committed not to reward terrorism. The Roadmap understands that a "two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only be achieved through an end to violence and terrorism, when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror. . . ." However, the Palestinian-Israeli context differs greatly from that of America's September 11 context. Although parallels exist in that on September 11 innocent American civilians were targeted and in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict innocent Israelis and Palestinians are being targeted, America was not the cause of September 11's blind hatred, but Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is. Occupation, if it were treated, would have presumably led to an end to morally repugnant and internationally prohibited acts of self-sacrifice and killing. Therefore, viewing the problem of "terrorism" separate from occupation, and requiring security to precede progress on substantive issues, may inhibit the Parties from reaching Phase II and Phase III of the Roadmap. Violence will continue to derail efforts that are not clearly aimed at ending the occupation, and peace will remain elusive if the United States does not recognize that Israel's occupation is violent, and Palestinian reactionary violence ends when occupation ends.

In reality, the Roadmap's compromise resulted in security-heavy plan (similar to the Mitchell and Tenet plans). Phase I requires the Palestinian side to take visible efforts to arrest, disrupt, and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere. Such a demand asks Palestinians for too much and gives too little, at a time when the Palestinian leadership faces a legitimacy crisis. Israel has demolished the Palestinian Authority's security forces. The Palestinian opposition has popular Palestinian support. Palestinians are divided, not about who wants Peace and who does not, but rather on what constitutes minimum national Palestinian aspirations to accept a peace settlement; and, even more importantly, how can Palestinians achieve these aspirations in light of Oslo's experience and Israel's recalcitrance and ongoing settlement expansion policy. It is difficult for any Palestinian leadership to prosecute Palestinians who out of despair and lack of hope resist the occupation when that leadership is not delivering goods; particularly because the Palestinian struggle is a legitimate one that the international community has consistently endorsed since the 1970s. Although Mahmoud Abbas's recent appointment as Palestinian Prime Minister meets minimum international demands for change in Palestinian leadership, which may allow for some progress, this circumvents the problem. The anti-Oslo camp's popular support may lead them to remain unwilling to lay down their arms while Israeli occupation persists. As long as Palestinian leadership remains unable to deliver and Israel continues "targeted" assassinations, collective punishment, discriminatory practices, killing of civilians, destruction of homes, bulldozing of farm land, and humiliating Palestinians remains in the name of security and the war on terrorism remain unchecked, the prospect for peace will always remain grim.

The Roadmap pledges an independent and sovereign Palestinian state that is "contiguous." This constitutes a major departure from old thinking and is a direct lesson from Oslo during the Camp David 2000 negotiations. However, the Roadmap uses the language of enhanced "maximum territorial contiguity," which implies that a resolution of the settlement issue in Phase III will include maintaining a majority of Israeli settlements in the West bank and Gaza Strip. Phase I of the Roadmap requires removal of recent settlement "outposts", ones that were unauthorized by

³ Polls in America show that most Americans support Bush and his stand on terrorism.

Israel to be built, and calls for a freeze on all future settlement activity. This means that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, which is illegal under international law, could remain within and around all the Israeli settlements, roads, fortifications, and the Separation Wall (built by Israel to unilaterally draw borders). Again, one wonders whether the Roadmap has partially accepted Israel's unilateral action is predicated on the notion of security for peace. Palestinians should not be the ones who pay the price for Israel's policy to settle people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by accepting divided territory that will face great difficulty sustaining itself economically. These, coupled with maintaining the above points of friction, make the term "maximum contiguity" mean, in reality, minimum contiguity.

The Roadmap's Phase II offers conditional statehood with provisional borders. It also offers international recognition and possible full-fledged UN membership. This is a positive development that recognizes the necessity to immediately end the occupation by proposing to create an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty," as a transition phase to final settlement status. Such a development would demonstrate Israel's good faith towards Palestinians, as well as, its intent to end the conflict. However, the Roadmap makes this option contingent on Palestinian security performance, among other satisfactory conduct, and will only occur *if* the Quartet believes the conditions are appropriate.

More importantly, the Roadmap does not address a plethora of legitimate potential Palestinian concerns:

- When will the interim arrangement becomes permanent;
- How will the refugee problem be resolved;
- How will the Jerusalem issue be resolved;
- What if the territorial solution is not based on Resolution 242's land for peace formula;
- What if becoming involved in the Roadmap legitimizes settlement activity that does not come to a halt; and
- What if Israel continues to stall at a time when the Palestinian question has become marginalized globally, as well as, regionally?

Inherent in the above observations is a mega-Palestinian fear that another interim arrangement will become permanent. On this concern the Roadmap is silent and offers no guarantees. Therefore, even if the Parties progress to a Palestinian state with provisional borders, the entire process could collapse on final status and related issues.

The Roadmap leaves the most contentious issues until Phase III. The Roadmap does not deal with Borders, East Jerusalem or the Palestinians right to return, even though these issues led to Camp David's 2000 collapse, for example, when the Israel offered Palestinians, at the most, joint sovereignty over East Jerusalem. As for refugees, Palestinians that were driven away from their homes have a right to return under international law. On the other hand, Palestinians recognize that Israel itself was founded on the Law of Return for the Jews. Any successful plan must acknowledge, negotiate, and lead to the resolution of these thorny issues. As all other efforts since Oslo, the Roadmap differs the Palestinian right of return and East Jerusalem issues, making them potential time bombs that could blow away Phase III. More importantly, how can the international community expect the Palestinians to grant Israel the benefit of the doubt and believe in the Roadmap when Israel, the party with the most power, would prefer to leave such issues unresolved, as Palestinians experienced during Oslo.

The Roadmap's has a larger problem in that it adopts Oslo's peace-meal approach. An incremental approach allows Israel to change the status quo and threaten the peace process. It also

provides the opportunity for radicals on both sides to sabotage the process. The Road Map responds by laying down a shorter time-line for progress, and that by two years the Parties will reach final status negotiations, instead of five, as was in Oslo. Such a process is still vulnerable. Even if Palestinian factions agree to a cease-fire, all it takes is one attack on either side, in one day, to put an entire peace process in jeopardy. The Roadmap calls on both Parties to educate their people about peace and co-existence and to limit incitement. One wonders, however, whether this is enough, considering that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has fed hatred on both sides for over ninety years. Although official conduct on both sides could change, there are elements that will seek to destroy the peace process.

Finally, the fact that the American president is now directly involved, and has placed his prestige on the line to achieve a solution, although very important, may be ineffective in light of past experience. For example, last spring, when Israel reoccupied the West Bank, President Bush demanded “withdrawal without delay.” Yet, Israel ignored him and President Bush did nothing. More recently, President Bush criticized Israel’s assassination policy. When Israel refused to backtrack, he switched to criticizing Hamas. In addition, the US will unlikely continue to engage the parties to the degree necessary. This attitude mainly prevails because the US knows that the only certainty in getting embroiled in a peace process is that there will be setbacks. Furthermore, the US recognizes that both Israel and the Palestinians have difficulty believing that peace is possible at this time. Without Palestinians unifying their ranks and Israelis electing a Labor-led government, the US is unlikely to invest heavily in a new and improved path to peace. This is especially true because the Bush administration’s strong support for Israel and tough stance on terrorism has made the Jewish vote open to Republican inroads for the first time since the Regan presidency. Thus, the question remains of how the Parties themselves can stop the violence and develop trust, while others try to derail the process. However, at present, as elections draw near, the Bush administration is finding it safe to extensively engage the parties during Phase I, because a majority of the responsibility lies on the Palestinians shoulders, and successfully achieving a cease fire will be viewed as a great success, without having to risk pressuring Israel on the substantive issues in Phase II and III.

Nevertheless, despite these disheartening shortcomings, a potential solution has been floated and both Parties chose to pursue it. Now, the Palestinian leadership has accepted a host of responsibility, including Israel’s security. In doing so, Palestinians must trust that Israel will stop building settlements to change the status quo in its favor. Palestinians must also perform. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict’s Roadmap may lead the Parties to lose their way yet again, which leads one to wonder how much longer does a better, safer Middle East have to wait?