

Israel and the Palestinian Authority:

The Security Agenda

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Brief Analysis

As the stand-off over Har Homa continues, Israeli leaders and commentators are increasingly calling for a shake-up of the incremental Oslo process and an immediate move to substantive "final status" talks. According to this argument, leapfrogging over the rest of the "interim phase" has the benefit of avoiding a series of confrontations that are virtually inevitable over the next 18 months and instead, enables the two sides to deal head-on with the core issues that divide them: borders, Israeli settlements, political framework, refugees and Jerusalem. For Palestinians, the idea offers speedy negotiations on the issues that matter most to them; for Israelis, a jump to "final status" has the advantage of preserving bargaining chips that Israel might otherwise be forced to sacrifice in the interim phase.

Whether the two sides stick to their current timetable or accelerate final status talks (which were scheduled to convene March 17 but have since been delayed), every step taken in negotiations will be shaped by its impact on security. Indeed, for mainstream Likudniks and Laborites alike, the top priority vis-a-vis the future of the West Bank remains access to and the retention of territory needed for the country's defense. In this context, decisions taken concerning unresolved "interim phase" issues and "further redeployments" will have direct bearing on the country's long-term security posture and on Israel's negotiating stance when "final status" talks are taken up in earnest.

Outstanding "Interim Phase" Issues: While the Palestinians have yet to fulfill major security-related obligations spelled out in the Oslo accords (e.g., confiscation of unlicensed weapons and transfer of criminal suspects), key differences still remain over how to resolve three other "interim phase" security-related issues: safe passage, Dahaniya airfield and Gaza seaport, and the first "further redeployment."

- Safe passage---Oslo II provides for two overland routes connecting Gaza and the West Bank, to permit the free passage of people and goods between the two areas during daylight hours. Israeli concerns center on the possibility that the passageway might be used by terrorists to smuggle arms or personnel into Israel. Talks have focused on the possibility of convoys escorted jointly by PA police and Israeli troops, though relatively minor differences reportedly remain between the two sides on how to implement such a scheme. Israel has also considered construction of an elevated highway as a permanent solution to this problem, but various obstacles

(it could cost billions of dollars and take years to build) have scuttled such plans for now.

- Dahaniya airfield and Gaza seaport---Oslo II provides for a provisional airstrip in Gaza (one already exists in the West Bank near Ramallah) and for negotiations on the construction of a seaport in Gaza. The PA has since then built an airstrip at Dahaniya, in Gaza, but Israel and the PA have been unable to agree on security arrangements, and the airfield remains closed to normal air traffic. Israel, however, has decided to allow Yasir Arafat to move his personal jet from Al-Arish to Dahaniya this Friday, and will permit the airfield to be used by him. Israel would like to see security arrangements in place there similar to those in force at the Egyptian and Jordanian border crossing points, where Israeli personnel behind two way mirrors monitor the flow of personnel and goods. This would enable them to ensure that the airfield is not used for smuggling of arms and explosives, for the entry of individuals with terrorist ties, or for the repatriation of thousands of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon or elsewhere. Construction of Gaza seaport has been delayed by similar problems.
- The first "further redeployment" ---The Israeli cabinet voted two weeks ago to redeploy troops from some 9 percent of the West Bank (7 percent from areas near Jenin, Ramallah, and Hebron that had previously been jointly controlled by Israel and the PA and which now are to come under exclusive PA control, and 2 percent from Israeli controlled areas which will now come under joint Israel-PA control). This will entail handing over 50 more villages and 200,000 more Palestinians to exclusive PA control. Although the United States has affirmed Israel's view that determining the scope of redeployments is solely an "Israeli responsibility," for which negotiations with the PA are not required, the Palestinians have rejected the 9 percent as inadequate. In response, Israel could redeploy unilaterally, but it is not likely to do so, since Palestinian cooperation is considered necessary to ensure that the redeployment does not endanger the security of Israeli settlements adjoining PA-controlled areas. Israel, moreover, is not likely to agree to negotiate the redeployment with the PA or to expand its scope. It thus remains unclear how this impasse will be resolved. Moreover, each of the two "further redeployments" can be expected to spark a crisis, as each side tries to shape implementation of the interim agreement in order to negotiate "final status" from a position of strength.

Final Status Issues: Security-related issues in "final status" talks are numerous and complex. In addition to such prohibitions as on the Palestinians' acquisition of weapons of mass destruction or the right to form military alliances with states at war with Israel, specific West Bank-related Israeli requirements are likely to include:

- (1) Security buffer zones: Israel will seek sovereignty over (or at least long-term, open-ended control of) the Jordan Valley and the slopes of the highland plateau to its west as a first line of defense against potential ground threats from the east and as a barrier to terrorist attacks. It will also seek to annex land in western Samaria and around Jerusalem that will increase its defensive depth, place major settlements within (rather than beyond) its border, and assure control of underground water resources. Finally, it will want to retain control over several key east-west roads (such as the trans-Samaria highway) that connect Israel's coastal heartland with the Jordan Valley and that would facilitate the rapid deployment of Israeli military forces during a crisis or war.
- (2) Aerial overflight rights: Israel is likely to seek an arrangement whereby its air force can train over the West Bank (the country otherwise lacks sufficient space for overland training) and fly reconnaissance flights along the Jordan river valley.
- (3) Early warning: Israel will want to maintain a small number of intelligence, air defense, and perhaps ballistic missile early warning sites in the West Bank, in order to preserve its early warning capability vis-a-vis potential threats from the east (an Iraqi ground invasion force, or an air or missile attack from Iraq or Iran). Some of these might be co-located with Israeli settlements or be operated as isolated enclaves there.

(4) Demilitarization: Israel will demand that the PA and/or its successor not significantly exceed the level of armaments allowed under Oslo II (e.g., small arms and light armored vehicles; no antitank or anti-aircraft weapons). Israel is also likely to seek a permanent (or at least long-term) role in enforcing security at the various crossing points into the PA (e.g. airfields, seaports, and border crossings).

(5) Water: Israel derives about one-third of its water requirements from the West Bank, and will insist on joint management and sharing of these water resources. It may also insist on retaining parts of western Samaria to preserve its access to underground water sources there.

For its part, the PA will seek sovereign control over all of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem; to minimize Israeli involvement into Palestinian affairs (such as at the border crossing points) which it generally views as an affront to its dignity and its claim to sovereignty; to achieve maximum territorial contiguity of areas they control; and to set definite time limits for whatever concessions they do make to Israeli security concerns.

Conclusion: Apart from their political differences, fundamental disputes on security-related issues separate the minimal Israeli and Palestinian requirements and pose huge obstacles to any "final status" agreement. Moreover, even if the two sides do somehow reach accord, with Israel gaining PA consent to retain control over substantial parts of the West Bank, large Palestinian enclaves will remain within Israeli-controlled areas (for instance, Jericho in the Jordan Valley), while some Israeli settlements and early warning sites will remain in PA-controlled areas. This will perpetuate the need for open-ended cooperation between Israel and the PA at all levels to ensure the safety of Palestinians and Israelis, if the potential for friction or violence between the two sides is to be averted. As a result, the much sought-after goal of Israeli-Palestinian "separation" will not only prove very hard to achieve, but it may be less essential to the success of an agreement than the even-more-difficult-to-achieve objective of "coordination."

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