

Options for Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Territorial Issue

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

On January 20, 2011, David Makovsky and Jackson Diehl addressed a special Policy Forum luncheon at The Washington Institute marking the release of the new study [**Imagining the Border: Options for Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Territorial Issue**](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=301) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=301>). Mr. Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at the Institute. Mr. Diehl is deputy editorial page editor for the Washington Post. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

David Makovsky

Demystifying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires an understanding of where geography meets demography. Contrary to popular opinion, reconciling Palestinian territorial ambitions with the reality of Israeli settlers on the ground is indeed possible. The goal of [**Imagining the Border**](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=301) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=301>) is to present a menu of options for resolving the territorial component of the conflict, meeting Palestinian demands of minimal land swaps with a 1:1 ratio while allowing Israel to annex areas containing the majority of West Bank settlers.

It is important to demystify the borders issue, whether the parties try to solve all their problems at once or instead adopt a two-phased approach to final-status issues. The first approach is very ambitious, and its feasibility is uncertain. The second approach is also very challenging, but perhaps more attainable. Whereas Jerusalem and refugees are highly charged narrative issues that cut into the self-definition of both sides, borders and security are more manageable.

The parties could first reach an agreement on final borders with mutual recognition of Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people and Israel as the state of the Jewish people, both with equal rights for all their citizens. Such mutual recognition would be without prejudice to final-status issues. Although a form of mutual recognition was proffered in 1993, the issue of state identity was somewhat muted at the time, so it is important that the parties reaffirm it in an unambiguous manner. Jerusalem and refugees -- which require extensive societal conditioning -- could be negotiated later, as determined by a clear timetable accepted by both sides. In the Middle East, where all-or-nothing thinking inevitably results in nothing, an initial borders-security-recognition approach could give both sides

a tangible achievement.

The three territorial scenarios presented in this study were based on six core principles:

1. A 1:1 land swap ratio
2. Israeli annexation of areas that are home to approximately 70-80% of settlers
3. Israeli annexation of a minimal amount of land acquired in 1967
4. No Palestinian dislocation
5. Measures that satisfy Israeli security concerns
6. A contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank

In the maximalist map, Israel would annex 293.1 sq km (or 4.73% of the baseline territory, which includes Gaza, the West Bank, the northwest portion of the Dead Sea, half of pre-1967-defined "No Man's Land," and all of east Jerusalem except Mount Scopus, amounting to 6,195 sq km). This land contains 43 Israeli settlements that are home to 239,246 settlers (or 80.01% of all West Bank settlers). The 77 other Israeli settlements in the West Bank (containing 59,782 settlers, or 19.99% of the total) would remain within Palestinian territory. The main feature of this map is the inclusion of Ofra and Bet El, where most of the settler movement leadership lives, as well as a few smaller settlements in the same bloc.

In return, Palestinians would receive an equal amount of land from within Israel proper. This land includes quality farmland bordering the West Bank, as well as a large quantity of arable land adjacent to and south of Gaza; low-quality land, such as that in the southeast West Bank, is avoided. This is in line with demographic trends, as Gaza's population density and growth are significantly higher than the West Bank's. Key to this land swap is the Palestinian annexation of 138.3 sq km in Chalutzah, an area south of Gaza. The kibbutzim immediately north of this area have flourishing agriculture, so there is no reason why arable Chalutzah could not as well. The land could also be used for industry, a sector that employs 18% of Gaza's residents, compared to only 12% in agriculture.

In the second map scenario, Israel would annex 267.0 sq km (4.31% of the baseline territory). This land contains 38 Israeli settlements that are home to 219,223 settlers (73.31%). The 82 other settlements (containing 79,805 settlers, or 26.69%) would remain within Palestinian territory. Under this scenario, the expanded Ofra/Bet El bloc is not included, and Israel would cede only 112.3 sq km of Chalutzah.

In the minimalist map scenario, Israel would annex 230.0 sq km (3.72% of the baseline). This land contains 32 settlements and 204,802 settlers (68.49%), leaving 88 settlements (currently home to 94,226 settlers, or 31.51%) within Palestinian territory. This scenario excludes expanded Ofra/Bet El, the bloc north of Ariel, and Kfar Adumim.

It is worth noting that all of the above scenarios propose that Israel annex Ariel. This is because the Geneva Initiative -- a nongovernmental group spearheaded by Palestinians and Israelis, albeit Israelis on the dovish side of the spectrum -- has already produced a map that excludes Ariel. Under their scenario, Israel would annex 136.3 sq km (2.20% of the baseline) containing 19 settlements and 166,429 settlers (55.66%), while 101 settlements (currently containing 132,599 settlers, 44.34%) would remain within Palestinian territory. The latter figure of more than 132,000 settlers would be very difficult for Israel given that the 2005 Gaza pullout involved only 9,000. Nevertheless, the goal of **Imagining the Border** (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=301>) was to stimulate thinking, provide a menu for policymakers, and avoid endorsing any map.

Any West Bank-to-Gaza corridor was deliberately excluded from the maps in this study because Israel is unlikely to cede sovereignty over such a passage, preferring to reserve the option of closing it down in the event of a violent uprising. Including a corridor in the territorial accounting without the likelihood of Palestinian sovereignty over it would have been unfair. The maps also eschewed scenarios involving Israeli annexation of the Jordan Valley, since

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has made the important concession of reversing former prime minister Ariel Sharon's position that the valley should be annexed, instead requesting only an Israeli military presence sufficient to prevent Gaza-like smuggling. As for the likelihood of the two sides agreeing on such maps, Palestinian officials have expressed their willingness to discuss anything under former prime minister Ehud Olmert's proposed 6.5% land swap.

In addition to the maps, the study also provides interesting data regarding the political leanings of the bloc settlers (i.e., the majority of settlers, who live in blocs closest to the current boundary and are most likely to be annexed by Israel) versus nonbloc settlers (i.e., those living in settlements scattered throughout the West Bank), as revealed through 2009 Knesset voting data. In the bloc settlements, the Likud Party received the most votes (28%), followed by National Union at 13.7%. Yet 43.9% of nonbloc settlers chose National Union, with only 20.2% voting for Likud. This shows that although the bloc settlers felt comfortable voting for Likud (and its presumed prime minister, Netanyahu), nonbloc settlers felt that the more radical National Union faction -- which opposes any form of territorial partition with the Palestinians -- would better represent their interests.

The study also addresses another land swap proposal advocated by Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, in which the Palestinians would receive Israeli territory northwest of the West Bank -- commonly referred to as the Triangle -- in exchange for major settlement blocs. Under this scenario, the approximately 218,900 Israeli Arabs who reside in the Triangle would become part of the Palestinian state. This idea is highly controversial, as Arab citizens of Israel would surely protest any attempts to gerrymander them out of the state. Additionally, it is questionable to what extent such a swap would affect Israel's demographics -- Lieberman's stated goal -- as more than 1.3 million Arabs would remain within Israel proper.

Of course, recent changes in Netanyahu's coalition will influence the prospects for territorial agreements and other peace efforts. When Defense Minister Ehud Barak formed the Atzmaut Party, he effectively strengthened Netanyahu's hand, solidifying the prime minister's government and reducing U.S. leverage. As a result, the Obama administration must either step forward with ideas of its own or step back, calling the parties recalcitrant and leaving domestic politics to play out. Whatever the case, Netanyahu may well release a plan of his own in order to counter Palestinian efforts to secure international recognition of a Palestinian state.

Jackson Diehl

Imagining the Border (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=301>) is an astounding piece of work and a huge research feat. Its two major accomplishments are decisively refuting the notion that the settlement project has precluded a two-state solution, and illustrating that, even under the maximalist map, Israel can annex less than 5% of the land and leave ample room for the creation a Palestinian state. Moreover, the borders-first idea -- which has been endorsed by the U.S. administration and both Palestinian leaders, President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayad -- is a valuable possibility for moving forward. (Netanyahu himself has admitted in an interview that Jerusalem and refugees would be very difficult to resolve now.)

Even so, some of the maps leave reason for pessimism. So far, Netanyahu's government has yet to continue along Olmert's lines and endorse a 1:1 land swap ratio or the borders-first approach. And from a Palestinian point of view, the maximalist map is not workable. The maximalist scenario calls for Israeli annexation of Ofra and Bet El, which jut deep into the heart of a future Palestinian state. Bet El dominates the road between the two major Palestinian towns of Ramallah and Nablus. That bloc also includes Psagot, which literally overlooks the center of Ramallah. This type of scenario is unacceptable to Palestinians.

It is also problematic that none of the maps gives the city of Ariel to the Palestinians. Ariel was a big sticking point even in the Abbas-Olmert discussions.

It should also be pointed out that the Geneva Initiative map discussed in the study is the only one on which both Israelis (although arguably not a representative group of Israelis) and Palestinians (including Abbas himself) have agreed. Yet, on the downside, it would allow Israel to annex just 50% of the settlers and would cost over \$24 billion in projected compensation and relocation costs to implement.

In short, some scenarios that would be politically acceptable in Israel would not be for the current Palestinian leadership, which raises concerns about the viability of some of the study's proposals. Yet other scenarios, especially the minimalist and Geneva scenarios, could be promising.

This rapporteur's summary was prepared by Sheli Chabon. ❖

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