

The Road Map after Gaza

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This is a painful time for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, but one he believes is required for Israel's fundamental security and demographic interests. He has bet his political future on the disengagement from Gaza. If there is calm not just for the disengagement but over the coming months, Sharon will be vindicated. But if violence continues and nothing seems to have changed after such a painful step, Sharon will be vulnerable as the Israeli center moves toward the right.

While Sharon has emphasized the unilateral nature of the decision, it is ironic that his political future now depends on Palestinians preserving calm and not committing acts of terror against Israelis. Certainly, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas is committed to stopping the violence. He has been against the terror and violence even prior to becoming the head of the Palestinian Authority. In his recent speeches, he has called on Palestinians to recognize that their interests demand not attacking the Israelis and he has ordered Palestinian security forces to create a buffer outside of the areas in Gaza from which Israel is withdrawing.

Abbas' strategy for maintaining calm was always one of cooptation, not confrontation, with Hamas and the other militant groups. He put together an understanding with them for a Tahdiya (period of calm), which has been less than perfect. For the time being, Hamas has declared that it will not carry out attacks, but it has already proclaimed it will not give up its weapons or "resistance" after the Israelis leave Gaza. Abbas will thus find it difficult to continue this approach if they begin to carry out attacks in the West Bank to prove they are still resisting.

Abbas will only change his strategy and become more decisive if he feels his authority is growing. To give him such confidence, he must be able to show that his way -- the way of non-violence -- is paying off. To date, he has had little to show his public as life for the most part has not improved.

He will need help, not as a substitute for what he must do, but in parallel with the steps he must take. Here the Bush

administration should press him while it also acts in four ways to help him build his authority -- something that is essential for raising the costs to Hamas and others of challenging him.

First, the administration must be the spearhead for getting international pledges of assistance transformed into labor-intensive projects on the ground. To date, billions have been pledged, but little has been delivered and Palestinians are not going back to work. With the Israelis out, expectations of the Palestinian public will be high and Abbas must be seen as producing very quickly on jobs in Gaza.

Second, the administration working with the European Union and World Bank should help the Palestinian Authority function more effectively. Abbas inherited Yasser Arafat's system of corruption and ineptitude. He needs systematic help to build his administrative capacity, with specific goals, monitoring, and evaluation established.

Third, the key to Gaza's economy is having unencumbered access to the outside world and the West Bank for the movement of people and goods. That will only happen if Israel is satisfied with the security arrangements to prevent smuggling of weapons and infiltration of terrorist operatives. But the security-for-access arrangements are not yet agreed. While Jim Wolfensohn, the administration's envoy for disengagement, is likely to help forge such arrangements, they will be complicated and are certain to break down. To avoid shutdowns of access and the resulting sourness, Wolfensohn must have the mandate to put in place credible dispute resolution and enforcement mechanisms at each passage and crossing point.

Fourth, the administration must build a bridge to the future. The two sides have very different expectations on what will happen after disengagement: Sharon wants a pause to absorb the emotional trauma and Abbas wants next steps. Each needs an explanation for what is next. The administration should declare that it will take the moribund roadmap and negotiate a common understanding on every Israeli and Palestinian obligation. It won't be easy and will take time. It will take the kind of mediation that the administration has avoided until now.

But Gaza disengagement creates an opening, and it will close for Sharon and Abbas unless the administration recognizes where we are and what is now necessary.

Dennis Ross, special Middle East coordinator in the Clinton administration, is author of *The Missing Peace*.



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