

The Roadmap, the Fence, and the Prospects for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (Part II)

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In-Depth Reports

The Palestinian political leadership agreed to the Roadmap without condition for several reasons. First, we supported it as a collective international project to resolve the Palestinian issue and implement President George W. Bush's vision for peace in the Middle East. Second, the Roadmap includes a clear indication that the State of Palestine will be declared in 2005 and calls for a settlement of the permanent- status issues in accordance with international law. Third, it includes a clear reference to the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the March 2002 Beirut Summit and calls for an international conference, ensuring that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks will not be ignored.

In addition to these major elements, which conform to Palestinian policy, the Roadmap was presented at a time when Israelis and Palestinians were exhausted from the bitter, three-year conflict. The Roadmap also came along in the context of the global American war on terrorism, which the Palestinians saw as an opportunity to protect themselves against a wider storm that could destroy their hopes -- if they did not distance themselves from terrorism by denouncing it in favor of a political solution.

After agreeing unconditionally to the initial Roadmap formula, the Palestinians began to implement the plan. They created the post of prime minister, took important steps toward unifying their security apparatuses, began the process of drafting a constitution, and took numerous important reform measures with regard to public administration and financial transparency. At the outset, the Palestinians responded positively to President Bush's initiative at the Sharm al-Shaykh conference. They took many steps to demonstrate goodwill when the new prime minister, Abbas, delivered a clear and positive speech to the Israeli people about his readiness to provide all the necessary conditions for a lasting peace.

When the Palestinian prime minister initiated the security duties of his government, according to the first stage of the Roadmap, he found that the best way to achieve calm in an adequate timeframe was to reach an internal Palestinian understanding through a hudna, or truce. There was consensus on a ceasefire by all armed groups for three months, and we tried to expand the hudna into a long-term ceasefire. The Americans accepted this idea with difficulty, and the Israelis were also very cautious. But the hudna succeeded in reducing the level of violence and incitement to a minimum. Prime Minister Abbas started a new round of talks with the armed factions to extend the hudna and address the possibility of transforming the armed factions into political parties. Serious measures were made to implement this policy, which was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council under the slogan, "One Authority and End the Violence."

Real and limited progress has been made to implement the first stage of the Roadmap. In light of the successful hudna, there was a partial redeployment of Israeli troops in Gaza that improved the lives of citizens. There was a withdrawal from the hudna. I personally participated in the last two. I left those two meetings afraid for Abbas's future. We tried hard to convince Sharon that Abbas was struggling to end the cycle of violence in favor of the political path. But Sharon never understood Abbas. He never knew how to deal with him, and many times Sharon incited against him.

Israel's caution with regard to the idea of hudna created a climate that made the ceasefire likely to collapse. And that is just what happened. When Israel resumed the policy of assassination in Nablus and Hebron, we returned to the cycle of action and reaction. Finally, when the hudna collapsed and the flow of blood was resumed with even more intensity, the Abbas government disappeared from the political scene. This is the current situation. Violence and incitement have returned and burgeoned. The suicide attacks in Israel, which we condemn completely, give the Israeli government strong motives to continue the policies of assassinations and siege. But these policies have become useless, even according to Israeli public opinion, and achieve the opposite result for which they are intended. The Israeli press even published numerous articles speaking about the positive results of the hudna and the negative results of military action. The hudna, which lasted for fifty days, was more effective in providing security to Israel than the previous three years of war. Nevertheless, the state of calm collapsed, the Abbas government collapsed, and the Roadmap was shelved for use at a later time. The question is, when?

The Palestinians tried to put their internal affairs in order under much confusion and many negative influences. When Abbas's partner in the adventure of Oslo, Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala), was selected to succeed him, the Israelis took the vengeful step of removing Arafat. This Israeli decision brings conditions back to what they were at the start of the intifada. Instead of searching for ways to direct influential Palestinian forces toward calm and deescalation, the situation has deteriorated. I do not want to spend much time arguing about who is responsible for the deterioration. Each party has its own interpretation that it backs with facts. Each party, according to its view, is in the right. I will instead present some ideas that could help contain the deterioration and provide an appropriate climate to think calmly, away from the sounds of war.

First, the United States should sponsor an urgent effort to reach a comprehensive ceasefire between Palestinians and Israelis with the participation and guarantees of the other Quartet members and the Arab countries that participated at Sharm al-Shaykh.

Second, Israel should restart the process of withdrawing from Palestinian towns and introduce concrete improvements in the lives of Palestinians. In return, we will implement specific measures in the Palestinian Authority's Roadmap obligations. Now is the right time to benefit from Arafat's influence, as his isolation has only led to further deterioration.

Third, the Roadmap formula for monitoring and follow-up that the United States is currently following mostly takes the form of mediation and bridging gaps between the two parties. Instead, the current situation requires urgent, escalated involvement, increasing the number of monitors and strengthening their ability to make parties meet their obligations.

Fourth, the Quartet was granted an important role in formulating the Roadmap, but in the implementation phase, its role ended. In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an international presence is necessary to create moral and political balance between the parties, and to provide implementation guarantees. Why is there no effective attempt to make the Quartet a partner in the Roadmap process? Objections on this issue come from Israel, and the objections are political. The Israelis do not like Quartet involvement, preferring limited American involvement instead. This is no longer realistic. I understood Israel's fears of international involvement when the Soviet Union was an effective Cold War power. But as the positions of countries have become more favorable to Israel, why has Israel not changed its own position on international involvement? Why do its fears persist when the cause of its fears is gone?

Fifth, the success of American involvement in Iraq will require stronger efforts to activate a political track between Israel, the Palestinians, the Lebanese, and the Syrians. The Roadmap ensures that the Syrian and Lebanese issues are dealt with in the context of an international conference. The delay in making progress on this track will create obstacles for everyone. I would like to see a renewed American vision of the Middle East in the wake of the occupation of Iraq. The issue of Palestine is central to the Arab and Islamic nations. The proposed solutions -- their

content and formulation -- should contain a positive link between solving regional disputes and fighting the global war against terrorism. It is time to listen to advice from the Europeans -- the British in particular -- about solving the Palestinian problem as one pillar in the larger goal of eliminating global centers of terrorism and violence. I suggest, after providing calm, that a new track for negotiations on the permanent-status issues be opened in parallel to the other negotiations called for in the Roadmap. To ensure practical solutions, the Roadmap needs inventive initiatives of this kind.

Regarding the wall, we speak with goodwill and a desire to reach a solution. The Israeli government is in the process of taking a fateful decision to complete the construction of the separation wall. The Palestinians will accept neither the wall nor the settlements; both will surely bring collapse to any advances on our part. The wall also sends a discouraging message to the civilized nations aspiring to replace conflict with coexistence. This wall is being built at the beginning of the twenty-first century, while humanity celebrated the collapse of the Berlin Wall at the end of the twentieth century. From a security point of view, the wall will not be effective. Instead, it will incite hundreds of thousands of Palestinians whose land will be swallowed and whose ability to travel will be blocked. The wall contradicts the principle of achieving security through political formulas.

Finally, I would like to convey a short message to the Palestinians, to Fatah, to Hamas, to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and to the forces of peace in Israel. I am proud to have belonged to Fatah for thirty-five years. It is the best political movement embodying Palestinian nationalism, and is more capable than any other of understanding regional and international influences on the Palestinian issue. It is also the leader of political realism in the Arab arena. It was the party that initiated the armed struggle and the one that signed the first Palestinian agreement with Israel. I call upon Fatah to look more deeply and realistically at its leadership role. I call on it to focus efforts on building the homeland on strong foundations through modern institutions and a democratic, pluralistic, and parliamentary system. Fatah began this course when it created the Palestinian Authority, elected the first parliament, and renovated the infrastructure for the coming state. It will continue to pursue this course and should reorganize itself once more to meet the needs of Palestinian society.

I call on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to consider the possibility of transforming themselves into political movements. I call on them to declare a clear commitment to one national authority and to respect its signed agreements and understandings with the Israelis. I call on them to enter the institutions of the Palestinian Authority through the wide doors of democracy and with realism, not in the spirit of strengthening their own influence, but to participate in the national duty of state building. The options before the Palestinian people should be collective ones realized through national institutions, not through factional programs. Currently, each party implements its own policies without considering the impact on society as a whole.

In spite of the remarkable weakness of their influence, the forces of peace in Israel should not stop working. They are still the responsible and realistic voices. They should reorganize their ranks and enlarge their role. They will find on the Palestinian and Arab side similar forces determined to overcome all obstacles in developing a popular awareness of peace. These forces retreated under the pressure of the armed dispute. But the current situation gives strong reasons for unity and activism in order to end the armed struggle through political formulas. Governments alone do not achieve a strong and stable peace. The awareness and interest of the people are required.

Ehud Olmert addressed the conference on this same topic. [Read his remarks. \(templateC07.php?CID=193\)](#) ❖

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