

# From Acceptance to Implementation: Next Steps for the Roadmap

by [Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](/experts/robert-satloff)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](/experts/robert-satloff)

Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute, a post he assumed in January 1993.



## Brief Analysis

Israel's cautious approval of the Roadmap opens a new phase in Middle East peacemaking. Although media focus will now turn to the next episode of high-level engagement by President George W. Bush—perhaps at a Jordan-Egypt-hosted regional summit in early June—the real test for Washington and its Quartet colleagues comes in the implementation of the first phase of Roadmap requirements.

### Israel's Endorsement

On May 25, Israel's cabinet voted 12 to 7, with four abstentions, to affirm Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's May 23 statement to "accept the steps set out in the Roadmap." That statement was itself made in response to a U.S. commitment to "fully and seriously address" Israel's fourteen points of concern about the Roadmap at appropriate times during the Roadmap's "implementation phase."

In reality, none of the twelve "yea" ministers actually supports the Roadmap; indeed, most are convinced that it is inimical to Israeli security. Nevertheless, the Roadmap's endorsement was the logical extension of a decision made by Sharon in October 2002. At that time, when the Roadmap was in its early drafting stage, Israel had two options: to denounce the text publicly and demand wholesale revisions or to withhold criticism during the Iraq war build-up and focus instead on forging an ever-closer strategic understanding with President Bush. Sharon chose the latter.

That decision had profound implications. On the positive side, Sharon did develop what is, by all accounts, a deep, personal bond of understanding with Bush. On the negative side, the decision effectively deprived Israel of the right to veto the Roadmap once its text had been ironed out within the Quartet. Although some of Israel's concerns were addressed in the Roadmap's final version, seven months of official "no comment" on the text essentially betokened Israel's consent. Sharon seems to have assessed that rejecting the Roadmap now after having demurred from public jockeying over its contents since October might have damaged, if not scarred, his relationship with Bush.

Even so, Sharon's endorsement of the Roadmap was not unambiguous. Israel accepted the "steps set out" in the Roadmap rather than the Roadmap itself. This position was both diplomatically prudent and politically insightful. As far as diplomacy is concerned, Israel essentially maintained its long-time, principled position that it would not formally endorse a peace plan whose terms it did not negotiate. Politically, though, Israel recognized that Bush is

almost surely more interested in building progress for the peace process in general than in demanding formal Israeli agreement to every line in the Roadmap. Hence, Israel found a way to align itself both with Bush and the Roadmap, all the while retaining some freedom to maneuver. Of course, that freedom is dependent on the president's continued goodwill.

### Israeli Next Steps

For Israel, that goodwill may soon be tested by its response to an expected U.S. request for the dismantling of illegal settler outposts in the West Bank and Gaza. (Unlike settlements, which were established with, or eventually acquired, full government authority, outposts are largely wildcat operations set up without formal government approval.) The dismantling of outposts is likely to be viewed as Israel's principal contribution to the empowerment of new Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas and its signal act during the Roadmap's first steps.

As with the Roadmap itself, the Sharon government is of two minds on outposts. Some in Jerusalem believe it is better for Israel to take advantage of its standing in Washington to wage a fight with the Bush administration now, over outposts, rather than wait for diplomatic momentum to build and be forced to fight a battle over settlements at a less propitious moment in the future. Advocates of this approach argue that at least one-third—and possibly as many as two-thirds—of the outposts have some amorphous legal standing. The best solution for "illegal" outposts, they suggest, is simply to "legalize" them into settlements.

Others in Jerusalem, however, view this as a too-clever-by-half solution that runs the risk of alienating Bush. Moreover, they sense that Washington may be adopting a more flexible position on the issue of settlements themselves. The fact that the Bush administration has made a distinction between the 100-plus outposts and the nearly 150 settlements is itself a signal that the two fall into different categories. This distinction was reflected in a May 12 interview given by Secretary of State Colin Powell to Egypt's Nile satellite television in which he said "outposts must go" but then offered a sympathetic view of Israel's position on "natural growth." As Powell said, "We are talking about people who live there with their families and who have lived there in some cases for more than one generation. So, it is not just a simple matter of saying 'settlement be gone.' It is going to have to be a subject of intense conversation between the two sides."

Sharon's position is unknown. On the Roadmap, he showed that his investment in Bush trumped his fidelity to Likud ideology. The coming weeks will show whether the man who, as foreign minister, once called on settlers to "grab every hilltop" will, as prime minister, agree to the dismantling of all (or at least most) of the outposts as further investment in Bush's peace strategy.

### Palestinian Next Steps

For its part, the new Abbas government has been focusing more on its internal standing than on implementing its Roadmap requirements. For example, the Roadmap demands Palestinian efforts to begin "sustained, targeted, and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure." Yet, Abbas has limited himself to politely asking Hamas to suspend terrorist operations and agree to a six- or twelve-month ceasefire.

In the meantime, Abbas has been fighting a game of wits with Yasir Arafat. Even as he proclaimed his fidelity to Arafat, Abbas seemed to have won a key round last week when his chief security aide, Muhammad Dahlan, engineered the dismissal of senior police officers loyal to the chairman. Arafat upped the ante by issuing a presidential decree diluting Dahlan's powers (Arafat made the appointment of his loyal governors a presidential, not an interior ministry, prerogative). So far, Arafat has shown little inclination to step aside in favor of his longtime number two. On the contrary, he seems more buoyant than at any time since the start of the uprising, not least thanks to a series of pilgrimages to his Ramallah redoubt by the French, German, and Greek foreign ministers and

the European Union's foreign policy coordinator.

It should come as no surprise that, after only a month in his job, Abbas is reluctant to take on either Hamas or Arafat directly; he must do both if the Roadmap is to have any chance of success. More disturbing, however, is his lack of positive effort in areas under his control. One of the Palestinians' first Roadmap responsibilities is to "end incitement," yet anti-Israel venom persists, even in those organs that should be under Abbas's authority. For example, on May 23, the front page of the Palestinian Authority's official daily al-Hayat al-Jadida included not only a picture of a recent female suicide bomber in full "martyr" regalia, but also a death announcement that referred to her suicide operation in "occupied Afula"—a city fully within pre-1967 Israel. It is difficult to imagine a more chilling message to Israelis who doubt Palestinian commitment to a two-state solution.

If dismantling outposts is to be an early test of Israel's acceptance of the Roadmap, then ending incitement in all official statements and state-controlled broadcast and print media should be an early test of the Palestinian Authority. Both measures are feasible and easily verifiable; neither threatens the security of the party asked to show its bona fides. As Washington works hard to bolster Abbas's already shaky position, it does neither Palestinians nor Israelis a favor by turning a blind eye to inaction on this most basic component of peacemaking.

Robert Satloff is director of policy and strategic planning at The Washington Institute.

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