

Implementing the Roadmap:

Assessing the Prospective Monitoring Mechanism

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Brief Analysis

With last week's formal unveiling of the Roadmap, the Arab-Israeli peace process has moved into a new phase that is its most internationalized in a quarter century. The establishment of the Roadmap's all-important "verification mechanism"—the structure of which has largely been worked out among the Quartet's U.S., European Union (EU), Russian, and UN representatives—will give tangible expression to this heightened level of internationalization.

Context

On April 30, the Roadmap was officially presented to Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It calls on each side to implement measures in the political, security, and humanitarian realms within predetermined timelines, leading to two international conferences: the first to establish "an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty" and the second to confirm full Palestinian statehood and the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the Roadmap is not self-enforcing, it does envision a mechanism whereby "the Quartet will assist and facilitate implementation of the plan, starting in Phase I, including direct discussions between the parties as required." Given that the Oslo process suffered from the absence of firm, consistent, and transparent monitoring and verification, the creation of a mechanism to ensure compliance will be an important development. This is especially urgent given Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas's claim to Assistant Secretary of State William Burns (who visited Ramallah yesterday) that Palestinians are "already well on our way to implementing the Roadmap."

On the Ground

In recent months, Quartet experts have been fine-tuning the so-called "verification mechanism." In March, they tentatively agreed on the terms of a memorandum outlining the "structure" of that mechanism. Reportedly drafted by Alistair Crooke—the British security advisor to the EU's Middle East envoy who played a key role in trying to mediate the abortive Fatah/Hamas/Islamic Jihad ceasefire accord—the main elements of this mechanism are: Creation of a "Monitoring Committee" by the Quartet and, interestingly, by the "international community," an ambiguous term not found in the Roadmap itself. According to the March memo, this committee will "monitor the achievements of the parties in implementing the roadmap." Strangely, the first item listed for monitoring is a "cease-

fire," another term not found in the Roadmap. This raises doubt as to whether the practical aim of the Roadmap is merely a ceasefire, as opposed to the document's more transformative goals (dismantling of the terrorist infrastructure, collection of illegal weapons, etc.).

Appointment of a U.S. coordinator to chair the Monitoring Committee, which would include representatives from the Quartet, the two parties, and "others as appropriate." The committee's monitoring function will include drafting reports to the "Quartet of Special Envoys" (a diplomat-level grouping with Burns serving as the U.S. member) and referring matters to those envoys for their possible "intervention." In addition, "on the basis of verification," the committee will make recommendations on "whether it would be appropriate to move on to subsequent phases of the Roadmap." Reports will remain confidential unless released "on a case by case basis." The "others as appropriate" most likely refers to Egypt and Jordan, who have prescribed roles in the retraining of Palestinian security services.

Creation of four "specialized groups" on security oversight, Palestinian reform, humanitarian and emergency policy, and "special functions." Two of these groups—on security and special functions—will be chaired by the U.S. coordinator, whose role seems to be more administrative than executive. The March memo does not suggest that the U.S. coordinator will have any independent power to override decisions by his or her colleagues. The coordinator is only authorized to refer "disputes or problems" to the Quartet of Special Envoys, who in turn can refer a "serious difficulty" to the ministerial level (i.e., the secretary of state and his counterparts). Interestingly, the U.S. coordinator will be appointed "on a permanent basis," raising the question of how the Quartet defines "permanent" (as in the "permanent" resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that the Roadmap is designed to achieve.)

Establishment of the Monitoring Committee's headquarters in Jerusalem. It is unclear whether the decision to house the committee in Jerusalem rather than Ramallah and Gaza is born of logistical and security concerns or has a political purpose (e.g., because the Quartet considers construction within Jerusalem to fall within the Roadmap's call for a settlement freeze, or because it wishes to signal some international view on the future disposition of the city). To prevent misconceptions on this delicate issue, the Quartet should underscore the practical benefits of setting up shop in Jerusalem and make clear that the placement of the headquarters has no implications for future negotiation. Of course, any effort to implement the EU-UN view that a settlement freeze should apply to Israeli construction in Jerusalem would bring the process to a screeching halt.

United States versus the Quartet

Whereas the text of the Roadmap itself papered over differences between Washington and its Quartet partners, portions of the March memo suggest that European approaches to peacemaking remain alive and well within the Roadmap framework. These include a reference to "ceasefire" and the appointment of a U.S. monitoring "coordinator" with the trappings of power but not, at least on paper, its substance.

On these and other key issues, Quartet officials have not concealed their substantive disagreements with Washington. One of the most eye-opening examples of these can be found on the official UN website on Palestinian issues, which contains the "talking points" for then-EU representative (and Danish foreign minister) Per Stig Moeller during his Oval Office discussion with President George W. Bush and other Quartet ministers in December 2002. In one breath, the EU minister is said to have called for the creation of a "credible" Roadmap monitoring mechanism, while in the next he offered the following assessment of core Roadmap responsibilities: "Turning to the content [of the Roadmap], a major outstanding issue in the text is the linkage of the settlement freeze to a cessation of hostilities. This linkage poses quite frankly a problem for us. We are very concerned about the continuing expansion of settlements, which is a real threat to the realization of the Two-State solution and to the implementation of the Road Map. What we should be calling for is therefore an unconditional settlement freeze. The settlements are illegal according to international law and a freeze should not be made contingent on a ceasefire. Quite to the contrary the settlements have themselves developed into major flashpoints for violent confrontation. A settlement freeze would

provide decisive incentive to cessation of terror and violence" (Emphasis added).

As this remarkable passage suggests, not only is the principal European objective vis-a-vis Palestinians limited to a "ceasefire," but the European approach holds that even this goal should await an "unconditional settlement freeze"—positions that are fundamentally at odds with U.S. policy. As the March memo suggests, the final text of the Roadmap blurs, but does not resolve, these differences. Now that the Roadmap process has begun, the Bush administration will likely face a continual struggle not only to keep Arab-Israeli diplomacy on track, but also to maintain discipline and leadership within the Quartet itself.

Addendum

Inspection of the final Roadmap text shows that timelines drafted months ago were not amended to reflect its postponed publication. The result is that the security-laden Phase I began April 30 and is slated to conclude in May, less than one month later. This refusal to amend the text was evidently born of a reluctance to recognize in print—more than ten months after President Bush's landmark June 24, 2002, speech—the fact that it will be impossible to achieve full Palestinian statehood by 2005. That speech presented a three-year process as a "goal," not a requirement. Nevertheless, the implied 2005 target date has taken on a life of its own, leading to the surrealism seen in the official Roadmap. Hence, even before the Roadmap process gets underway, members of the Quartet have raised doubts about their commitment to a performance-based, rather than deadline-driven, diplomacy.

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