

# Through Street or Cul-de-Sac?

## Assessing the Latest Quartet Roadmap

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### Brief Analysis

On December 20, 2002, the Quartet convened at the White House to discuss the Middle East when President George W. Bush met with UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov, and three ministerial representatives of the European Union (Stig Moeller, Javier Solana, and Chris Patten). The purpose of this meeting was to secure the president's blessing for the Quartet's "roadmap" to Israeli-Palestinian peace, developed in order to fulfill the vision laid out in Bush's June 24, 2002, speech on the Middle East.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the president was quoted as expressing his "strong support for the efforts of the Quartet and his firm commitment to the Quartet's roadmap." The president saw the roadmap as realizing "his vision of two states—Israel and Palestine—living side by side in peace and security." Strong words such as these could give much hope to those committed to transforming relations between Israelis and Palestinians—something that I discovered is in very short supply during a recent trip to the area. Indeed, the legacy of the last two years has convinced Israelis that there is no Palestinian partner for peace. For their part, the Palestinians question whether the current Israeli government has any strategy besides attempting to extinguish their aspirations through force.

One interesting area of convergence is evident: neither side believes that any change is possible so long as Yasir Arafat remains leader of the Palestinians. The Israelis believe that Arafat legitimizes terror and has never reconciled himself to their existence. Palestinians understand that he is consumed by his mythologies and offers nothing but tired slogans. Yet, the two sides part company on what to do about Arafat: Israelis want him ousted, Palestinians want him marginalized. Palestinian reformers in particular are leery of appearing as if they are Israeli or American tools. Moreover, they do not want to challenge Arafat frontally; he remains an important symbol, and they do not want to split or weaken the Palestinian movement. Their response to this dilemma has been to push for elections at the municipal and legislative levels, but not the executive level. In their eyes, newly elected officials would have the authority to carry out reforms and nominate a prime minister in whom executive power would reside.

The problem, of course, is that they will not be able to hold these elections so long as the Israeli military occupies nearly every city in the West Bank. The Israelis will not withdraw, however, if they feel that doing so would spark a new wave of suicide attacks. Thus, if Palestinians do not act to stop terror against Israelis, the Israelis will not pull

out, spelling an end to the notion of holding elections, implementing reforms, or marginalizing Arafat. Without an intervention to alter this reality, the stalemate will only deepen, with frustration and despair growing on each side. This fact alone is a powerful argument for a roadmap with sequential and reciprocal steps. Following the logic of President Bush's June 24 speech, the roadmap is supposed to be performance based. According to the president, Palestinian statehood cannot be based on an infrastructure of terror and corruption; reform must come first and produce an alternative leadership.

### Evaluating the Latest Roadmap

The roadmap endorsed by the president last week represents a start, but should by no means be considered a finished product. The Bush administration has wisely chosen to postpone the finalization of the roadmap until after the Israeli national elections in January. The intervening time should be used to deal with the document's shortcomings. The roadmap claims to be comprehensive, "with clear phases, timelines, target dates, and benchmarks aiming at progress through reciprocal steps by the two parties in the political, security, economic, humanitarian, and institution-building fields." Yet, it fails in three important areas, and these failings will undercut performance and frustrate the Quartet's goals.

First, the document lacks comparable strategic goals for the two sides. The Palestinian goals of ending occupation and achieving a viable, sovereign, democratic state are spelled out clearly. But there is nothing comparable in the roadmap addressing Israel's strategic goals. Israel seeks recognition and acceptance as a Jewish state. The Palestinians' use of violence and their insistence on "the right of return" for refugees have convinced Israelis that Palestinians reject their right to exist as a Jewish state. It is not enough to speak about Israel living in peace and security; the roadmap must also require the Palestinians to clearly and unequivocally accept Israel's Jewish character. Similarly, the roadmap must move beyond calls for a comprehensive ceasefire. The Israelis do not need a ceasefire—they need a renunciation of violence that makes clear once and for all that there are legitimate and illegitimate ways to pursue the Palestinian cause. At no time during the Oslo process did the Palestinian leadership describe or treat those who carried out acts of terror against Israelis as enemies of the cause; no efforts have been made to delegitimize such elements. Unfortunately, the current roadmap fails in this regard as well. Until violent individuals and groups are delegitimized, terror will continue to be employed, and those in the Palestinian security services who are called on to make arrests will be seen as doing the Quartet's or Israel's bidding, not the Palestinians' bidding.

Second, the roadmap requires far too little of Arab leaders. For example, although it useful to say that "Arab states should cut off the public and private funding and all other support for groups supporting or engaging in terror," such language does little to delegitimize these groups. Instead, Arab leaders would make it easier for Palestinian reformers to declare the illegitimacy of terror if they joined them in proclaiming at the outset that those who are not prepared to resolve all differences through peaceful means are enemies of the Palestinian cause. Such a measure would surely bolster the reformers and those prepared to crack down on terror. In addition, Arab leaders could help Palestinian reformers by endorsing a Palestinian prime minister to hold executive power, which would serve as a profound signal that Arafat's time as a leader is past. These would not be easy steps for Arab leaders to take. Yet, the Israelis are expected to take tough steps at the very outset of the roadmap: "The government of Israel immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001 and . . . freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of all settlements)." Moreover, the United States has been asked to carry the burden of ensuring that the roadmap is implemented. Therefore, when Arab leaders come to President Bush—as they will after a war with Saddam Husayn—and say, "You proved yourself in war, now prove yourself in peace," he must be armed with a roadmap that requires them to assume their responsibilities.

Finally, the current roadmap creates the illusion of specificity. Although the document contains seven pages of

reciprocal obligations, my experience with the parties tells me that they will interpret each point differently. The Palestinians will have one definition for ending incitement, the Israelis another, the Europeans possibly a third. The same goes for an Israeli settlement freeze and for Palestinian responsibilities such as arresting terrorists and dismantling their infrastructure. Consequently, rather than providing criteria for evaluating performance by the two sides, each benchmark in the current roadmap will itself become a focal point for debate.

The roadmap need not be a lost cause. Its strategic goals must be symmetrical, however. Arab leaders must do their part, and each benchmark must be defined with a common meaning. If this is done, President Bush's vision might finally have a mechanism by which to become a reality, and the Quartet's roadmap may lead to something other than a cul-de-sac.

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