

The Quartet Roadmap, Take Two: Still at Odds with Bush's June 24 Speech

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky), [Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](/experts/robert-satloff)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



[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

Last Friday, while official Washington was still enjoying the Thanksgiving holiday break, the White House stealthily issued Presidential Determination 2003-04, whose first paragraph instructs the State Department to sanction the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) for noncompliance with obligations stemming from the Oslo Accords. This was ostensibly in response to evidence of official PA complicity in acts of violence and terrorism that had become too compelling to ignore. Yet, the very next paragraph orders that the specific sanction applied—downgrading the status of the PLO office in Washington—be waived, citing U.S. national security interests. The end result of this diplomatic two-step is a change in declarative U.S. policy (i.e., for the first time, a formal statement of PA noncompliance), but no change in effective policy.

As the December 20 target date approaches for the completion of the Quartet "roadmap" for Middle East peace, this Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde episode could provide a window into Bush administration policymaking. For weeks, the administration has actively pursued international approval for the roadmap. To this end, envoys from the United States and other members of the Quartet (Russia, the UN, and the European Union [EU]) have attempted to win Egyptian, Saudi, Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli support for the updated version of the roadmap completed on November 14. In Arab capitals, these efforts have won praise. Egyptian foreign minister Ahmed Maher extolled the second version of the roadmap, saying that it agreed to a large extent with the points that Washington had raised with Cairo; Jordanian foreign minister Marwan Muasher cited five areas in which the new roadmap was an improvement on its predecessor.

In contrast, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has urged that the entire roadmap issue be deferred until after the Israeli general election on January 28, 2003. So far, it is not clear whether the Bush administration will accede to Sharon's request, though the previously considered option of holding a formal endorsement or signing ceremony appears to

have been set aside. Nevertheless, the administration seems committed to the roadmap, evidently as a way to demonstrate to Europeans and Arabs that it can forcibly disarm Iraq and forcefully pursue Arab-Israeli peacemaking at the same time. Washington may also be counting on the fact that Sharon will not be able to object strenuously to the roadmap so long as his election campaign touts his warm relationship with the White House as a central achievement of his tenure.

A Close Look at the Updated Roadmap

Although the November 14 version of the roadmap still contains elements that are in dispute between the United States and its Quartet partners, these are few in number; the bulk of the text seems to have the support of all Quartet members. The roadmap is ostensibly an elaboration of President George W. Bush's landmark June 24, 2002, speech that *inter alia* called for new Palestinian leadership as a precondition of U.S. support for Palestinian statehood, which, he said, could be established within three years. Yet, numerous points in the updated roadmap are actually at variance with the June 24 speech.

Change in leadership. In June, Bush stated, "Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership, so that a Palestinian state can be born. I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror." The new roadmap, however, compromises these requirements for statehood. The previous draft of the roadmap clearly stated that Palestinian elections should be devoted exclusively to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Yet, the Europeans evidently want to exclude mention of the PLC in the updated roadmap, thus leaving room for a presidential election, which, under current circumstances, would almost surely result in the "reelection" of Yasir Arafat. Moreover, under the new draft, the Palestinians would not be obliged to name an empowered prime minister until after their state had been formed. Taken together, these changes turn Bush's speech upside down.

Fighting terrorism. The Bush speech outlined a clear sequence: Palestinian efforts to combat terrorism are a prerequisite for statehood. As Bush stated, "Today, Palestinian authorities are encouraging, not opposing, terrorism. This is unacceptable. And the United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure." Yet, the updated roadmap does not state the consequences for Palestinian failure to fight terrorism. Moreover, much of the first draft's specificity regarding Palestinian counterterrorism efforts (e.g., weapons collection) has been deleted from the second draft. The newer version does call upon the Palestinians to "immediately implement an unconditional cessation of violence," in response to which Israel would freeze all settlement activity. Yet, the EU, Russia, and the UN would evidently like to dispense with these U.S.-backed calls for a comprehensive ceasefire as a prerequisite for Israeli action, instead demanding measurable Israeli efforts to enforce a total settlement freeze and, for the first time, stating explicitly that this freeze include "the area surrounding Jerusalem."

Powers of a Palestinian state. Bush's June speech made clear that the United States "will support the establishment of a Palestinian state whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional." The latest version of the roadmap, however, makes no reference to the idea of limited sovereignty (e.g., on issues such as demilitarization, renunciation of certain weapons systems, or restrictions on Palestinian control of air space, ground water, or borders).

The Quartet's role. Bush's speech made no mention of the Quartet. Yet, the roadmap states that the peace process will henceforth operate "under the auspices of the Quartet," and that the "performance-based approach" which it advocates will be judged neither by the local parties nor by Washington but on "the consensus judgment of the Quartet of whether conditions are appropriate to proceed, taking into account [the] performance of all parties." The roadmap also states that "the Quartet will meet regularly at senior levels to evaluate the parties' performance on implementation of the plan."

In remarks published in the November 25 Jordan Times, Jordanian foreign minister Muasher said that he viewed the Quartet's role as a crucial part of the monitoring mechanism. Washington maintains that "consensus judgment" implies an American veto. Yet, given the natural diplomatic preference for consensus over confrontation, especially during possible allied operations in Iraq, the United States is unlikely to use its Quartet veto any more frequently than it has its UN Security Council veto. The net effect is that every judgment on security and compliance will become subject to a round of bargaining among Quartet members.

Conclusion

Although the new roadmap does include some improvements on the original, it still represents the antithesis of Bush's June 24 vision for peacemaking in terms of substance, sequence, and procedure. Moreover, it makes no reference to his April 3, 2002, statement regarding the important role that Arab states can play by recognizing Israel's right to exist in secure borders. In fact, the new draft deletes a clause calling for all Arab states to establish peaceful relations with Israel at the culmination of the peace process. In so doing, the roadmap represents a step back even from Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's peace plan, raising the embarrassing prospect that a U.S.-endorsed peace plan may offer Israel less incentive on a key issue than a Saudi plan. Just as with the two-headed statement on sanctioning the PA issued last week, this schizophrenic approach makes it difficult to discern precisely what constitutes U.S. policy—the president's June 24 speech or the text of the roadmap as negotiated within the Quartet. To be sure, circumstances on the ground (e.g., terrorist atrocities and Israeli elections) may determine the fate of diplomatic initiatives such as the roadmap. By the time the dust settles from the Iraq crisis, however, Washington will need to come to grips with the fundamental conundrum that the roadmap represents, if not much earlier.

David Makovksy and Robert Satloff are, respectively, senior fellow and director of policy and strategic planning at The Washington Institute. They thank Institute military fellow Maj. Gen. Yaakov Amidror (IDF) for his contribution to this PolicyWatch.

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