From Bilateralism to Internationalization:

Security Implications of the U.S. Bridging Proposals

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Brief Analysis

With President Clinton due to meet Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat today for a last-ditch diplomatic effort, attention is focused mainly on two aspects of the U.S. bridging proposals: the division of Jerusalem and the future status of Palestinian refugees. In contrast, little attention has so far been devoted to the security aspects of the U.S. proposals. While less emotive, security issues need to be central to U.S. concerns about the viability of any "final status" accord and its impact on U.S. interests and allies. It is difficult, however, to assess this aspect of the proposals because so many key security issues were evidently not raised by the President in his pre-Christmas oral presentation to the two sides. They may have been the subject of previous or subsequent discussions among the parties, but they were not on the President's core agenda.

What Is Not in the Proposals According to an authoritative account of the President's proposals, published in Israel's Haaretz newspaper, items not mentioned include: security cooperation between Israel and the future state of Palestine; trilateral security relations among Israel, Palestine, and Jordan; terrorism/counter-terrorism; compliance and enforcement mechanisms; the definition of Palestine's status as a "non-militarized" state, including any limitations on Palestinian conscription, military spending, armaments, deployments, and numbers of men under arms; arms control and inspection regimes; border crossing inspections; security inside Jerusalem, especially given the lack of contiguity among Jewish neighborhoods and among Arab neighborhoods; and any limitations on diplomatic relations and/or military accords with countries still at war with one of the parties.

In addition, two other important items that have direct bearing on security that apparently were not among the President's proposals were the type of economic regime to cover relations between the two sides (Customs union? Free trade area? Limitations on flows of labor, goods, or capital?) and ideas for water management, usage, and supply (e.g., desalination). No maps accompanied the proposal. In essence, what the President proposed were merely the headlines of a plan, with the bulk of any agreement — even a "framework agreement" — still to be negotiated. In this respect, the chief Israeli and Palestinian complaint about the proposals' lack of specificity appears to be warranted.

Key Security Themes Three of the core security-related items in the President's proposals were as follows:

Israeli military withdrawal Israeli forces will be withdrawn from the West Bank and Gaza over a thirty-six-month period, after which they can remain stationed in specific Jordan Valley locations for an additional thirty-six months, under the supervision of an "international force" that will oversee the implementation of the accord. The international force can only be withdrawn by mutual consent.

Implications: With ratification of an agreement, Israel would immediately cede its freedom of maneuver east of the Israel–Palestine border, as an international force will begin deploying to supervise implementation of an agreement. Six years after ratification, Israel will have no forces east of the Israel–Palestine border, other than small units maintaining weapons depots and three early warning stations.

Emergency deployment According to the proposals, Israel can dispatch forces to the Jordan Valley after the regional security situation has deteriorated to the point of an imminent and demonstrable "national emergency."

Implications: This means that Israel cedes the deterrent capability of dispatching forces earlier to prevent a deterioration to the point of "national emergency." The proposals also do not discuss whether Israeli forces would travel from north/south or east/west (through Palestine's population centers) in the event of an emergency, who would ensure free access to deployments sites (the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)? The international force? The Palestine security forces?), and whether infrastructure can be maintained by the IDF at the Jordan Valley "security zones" to be ready for such an emergency. In addition, the proposals do not address the scenario of Palestine opposing an Israeli emergency deployment and the role of international forces would play in that situation.

Role of the international force Clinton's proposals give an international force (or "international presence") these responsibilities: monitoring implementation of the agreement by both sides; providing the umbrella under whose authority Israeli forces would remain in the Jordan Valley for the second three-year period of implementation; receiving notification of Israel's declaration of national emergency, necessitating the deployment of Israeli troops after the six-year implementation period has elapsed; and complementing the Palestinian security force by providing "border security and deterrence." Additionally, in one of the major Clinton proposals that has so far not received any media scrutiny, international "monitors" — perhaps constituted separately from the "international force" — would play a role in providing mutual confidence vis-a-vis the division of responsibilities and sovereignties on the Temple Mount/Noble Enclosure (Haram al-Sharif).

Implications:The proposals are vague as to the composition of the international force, its precise mission, and its area of deployment. Indeed, the two parties still do not know whether the force is to be deployed along the Palestine–Jordan border, the Palestine–Egypt border, the Palestine–Israel border, or along all three. The reference to "border security," without further qualification, suggests that the force would be deployed along all of Palestine's international borders, but this raises important questions about the development of Palestinian-Israeli security cooperation and whether the force would fulfill the onerous tasks of intrusive inspections of goods and people at border crossings and the difficult job of preventing illegal immigration. Similarly, monitors on the Temple Mount/Noble Enclosure would surely be a lightning rod for protestors and possibly a target for terrorist attacks, raising the issue of their mission and means for self-defense. And the reference to the force's deterrent power begs the question —deterrent against whom?

Conclusion In addition to their overall generality, the most striking aspect of the Clinton security proposals are their heavy reliance on international forces and presence. "Internationalization" appears as the solution for border security, deterrence, and even confidence-building inside Jerusalem. As the President reportedly said, "the key lies in international presence." This option appears to be the ninth-inning pinch-hitter for the effort at Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation that was at the heart of the seven-year old Oslo process. Given that the United States itself devoted so much effort to this project — highlighted by the extensive engagement of U.S. intelligence agencies — this shift away from bilateralism is remarkable. That the President seems to be proposing on the eve of his departure

from office a politically delicate, vaguely defined international military presence — precisely the kind of mission that President-elect George W. Bush has decried as generally inappropriate for the United States to take on — makes the proposals especially stunning.

To be sure, the violence of the last four months has destroyed much of the infrastructure of security cooperation and the mutual trust upon which it was based. But the Clinton proposals, one must recall, are not designed for the current situation but rather for the era of "end of conflict/end of claims," when the Israeli–Palestinian "final status" accord has been fully implemented and the century-long conflict has ceased to exist. In that sense, the U.S. proposals mark a sad and worrisome coda to the Oslo process: i.e., the President's apparent assumption that, even in an era of peace, mutual suspicion, hatred, and recrimination will remain more powerful than the mutual interest, trust, and confidence needed to implement a functioning system of peacetime security cooperation. Not only did the President's proposals include no incentive structure to re-create security cooperation in a post-peace context but the extent and form of internationalization actually work against both bilateral cooperation and effective separation.

If this analysis is correct, then every other aspect of security relations in the proposals needs to be reviewed in light of ongoing Israeli–Palestinian tensions post-peace: from the awarding of formal airspace sovereignty to the Palestinians, to the subordination of Israeli deterrent capability to the international force, to the significance attached to a UN Security Council resolution sanctifying the "end of conflict." This will, in turn, also have profound implications for the constitution and mission of the "international force/presence," including the potentially negative impact of U.S. participation in this force on the development of U.S.–Israel strategic relations.

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