

Two separate roadmaps: an Israeli view

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A new approach to the "roadmap" [1] idea must derive from a sober reassessment of the failings of the peace process thus far:

- UN Security Council Resolution 242, upon which the Oslo Declaration of Principles based final status negotiations, does not deal with specific Israeli-Palestinian issues like the refugees and Jerusalem, and is ambiguous about the territorial issues. It is therefore not a sufficient foundation for the process.
- The concept of a phased solution has failed. Phasing provided too many opportunities for the extremists on both sides to intervene. Certainly the final objective of the process must be defined in advance in order to provide focus and an incentive to proceed.
- The premise that close economic cooperation generates mutual trust and Palestinian prosperity also failed. Indeed, it proved totally counterproductive for security.
- The parties need outside help, including compulsory arbitration, but not an imposed settlement.
- Having repeatedly postponed dealing with the most acute problems – Palestinian violence and Israeli settlements – the parties have now reached a point where they must deal with them forthwith. These two afflictions threaten to erode and even destroy the very souls of their respective societies from within.
- Mutual trust has broken down so badly that negotiations should not take place at the beginning of the roadmap process. Productive talks must await a new process of confidence-building.
- The current roadmap ignores virtually all these realities and is largely inoperable.

We must begin with two separate roadmaps, based on parallel unilateral steps taken by both sides, only after which the roadmaps merge.

Both sides must jump

The damage wrought by Israel's settlement policies, coupled with the growing Palestinian demographic advantage, mandate a decision to undertake unilateral redeployment and dismantling of settlements if Israel wants to "save its soul" as a Jewish and democratic state. Israel must choose demography over geography. The advantages of withdrawing without an agreed concession from the other side over the Gaza Strip (with its seventeen settlements) and over the mountain heartland of the West Bank (some thirty-forty settlements) far outweigh the disadvantages. Israel would continue to hold the Jordan Valley, greater Jerusalem and the settlement blocs near the green line pending final status negotiations, and would complete construction of the green line fence with international assistance.

In parallel, the Palestinians must declare and implement a unilateral ceasefire. Here too, the advantages for Palestine of ending the violence without a defined gesture in return far outweigh the drawbacks. Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Palestinian population concentrations should facilitate this move. Palestinian security authorities will have to exercise special vigilance to ensure that Palestinian militants don't misinterpret Israel's withdrawal as a sign of weakness – otherwise the entire process will fail.

Two developments could follow. One is the stabilisation of the situation and a radical reduction in violence. This should enable an early resumption, on an emergency basis, of minimal economic relations, including movement of Palestinian day labourers into and out of Israel.

A second possible move is the introduction of an American-led international trusteeship [1] into the West Bank and Gaza, to oversee a process of infrastructure and economic recovery and sponsor steps toward state-building. One of the tasks of the trusteeship should be to develop a Palestinian economic base less dependent on the Israeli currency and customs infrastructure and more closely integrated into the regional Arab economy. This too will be rendered much easier by the separation of forces and removal of settlers instituted unilaterally by Israel. In effect, following Israeli withdrawal the Palestinian leadership could declare a state and introduce the trusteeship force unilaterally.

Once the situation is stabilised through this series of largely unilateral measures, the roadmaps will coalesce. Final status negotiations will commence, based on 242, the Saudi/Arab League plan and the Clinton principles. From the outset Israel would accept the 1967 green line boundary, with balanced territorial swaps, as the point of departure for a territorial settlement; the Palestine Liberation Organisation would acknowledge that there will be no right of return to Israel proper and that Israel has a legitimate historical claim to a role, however symbolic, on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif [2] (under Palestinian control).

Sadly, even the preliminary, unilateral acts called for by this plan do not seem likely as long as none of the three principal leaders – Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon and United States president George W. Bush – develops a realistic strategy for peace.

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