

American Leadership to Create a Two-State Solution



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Every contemporary American president has tried and failed to broker a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But because of the changes that have occurred over recent years, the stakes for the American administration's grudging and very belated effort—the much-discussed “road map”—are much higher than they have been in the past.

Certainly, the stakes are very high for Israelis and Palestinians. The cease-fires in the recent years of low-intensity war cannot bring a permanent end to the conflict. The two-state solution, which remains the preferred solution of majorities on both sides, is in grave danger because of Israel's settlement policy and the rapidly lengthening wall that Israel is building in the West Bank. As much of the very negative image of the United States in the Arab and Muslim worlds stems from American policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the stakes are higher for the United States as well.

American failure to broker a two-state solution before facts on the ground render it obsolete will fuel anti-American sentiment in the region, particularly if the United States occupation of Iraq continues to go badly. It is time for the United States to throw its weight behind the kind of drastic solution that is called for by these drastic times.

PREMISES FOR A NEW PEACE PLAN

The proposal presented here proceeds from four basic premises. The first premise is that the fundamental obstacle to peace between Israel and the Palestinians is the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, an occupation which has been in place since the conclusion of the 1967 war. The occupation is an

obstacle in all of its manifestations: the settlements, the Israeli military presence and, crucially, the severe limitations on Palestinian freedom of movement and commerce that have been tightened steadily since the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000. Israel's lack of security stems primarily from the persistence of the occupation. The right of return for Palestinians made refugees in 1948, on the other hand, is a much less intractable point of contention than many think.

The second premise is that, in the short to medium term, by far the best hope for a mutually satisfactory peace between Israel and the Palestinians remains the two-state solution, as envisioned, if not very precisely articulated, by United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, whose language the United States helped to draft in 1967. This resolution and its successive follow-up resolutions envisioned a state of Israel inside its pre-1967 borders, recognized by the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbors, and a state of Palestine in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem would be the shared capital of both sides, Israel to the west and Palestine to the east. Israeli settlements in the occupied territories would have to be removed, or rendered subject to Palestinian sovereignty.

The third premise is that, unfortunately, the facts on the ground are rendering achievement of the two-state solution increasingly difficult. Not only did the construction of settlements proceed at a furious pace during the course of the Oslo peace process of the 1990s, but Israel also constructed a series of bypass roads to link the settlements to Israel proper. Together with Israeli military bases, the settlements and bypass roads have established a lattice of Israeli control over the territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that can be exercised even when Israeli troops are not present in every square meter of that territory. This lattice of Israeli control covers the entirety of the territory that is envisioned as making up a future Palestinian state. The Israeli government is adding to this lattice of control by building a "security fence." In places, this "fence" is a complex of barbed wire and ditches; in other places, it is a twenty-five-foot high concrete wall. At first, this wall roughly followed the 1967 armistice line, but subsequent phases of construction have made it encroach deep into the West Bank. The wall creates a concrete noose around the town of Qalqilya, for instance. There is only one exit from Qalqilya, leading east toward the other Palestinian population centers. A substantial number of villages and agricultural lands are being cut off from the rest of the West Bank by the wall. In a classic understatement typical of American diplomacy *vis-à-vis* the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Bush administration National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice called this wall "problematic." But the wall is considerably more than problematic. It violates the spirit of every vision that not only the United Nations but also American administrations have espoused for the resolution of the conflict.

The fourth premise is that Israel and the Palestinians are very unlikely to reach a mutually satisfactory peace accord on their own without significant external help. Despite recent unofficial initiatives, the prospect of such an accord is bleaker now

than it has been at any point in the past thirty years. Although it may evacuate a few hilltop settler outposts here and there, Israel's current government represents the territorial ambitions of the settler movement. The present Israeli government will not compromise those ambitions unless it is forced to do so. The Israeli peace camp, in both its moderate and radical incarnations, is still a marginal force in Israeli politics, though recent unofficial peace initiatives may change that. On the other side, the Palestinian Authority has lost its former capacity to force controversial accords with Israel upon the population and upon the various armed factions in the Palestinian polity. The Palestinian Authority has lost substantial political ground to Hamas, and militant elements in the secular parties, which are not going to negotiate on matters of substance until the occupation has ended. Hamas, in particular, is making a bid to replace the Palestinian Authority as the *de facto* steward of the Palestinian cause. Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians has gravely decreased Israeli hope for peace through negotiations. On the other side, Israeli violence against Palestinian civilians, particularly in the course of the major tank invasions of the West Bank in 2002, has greatly decreased Palestinian hope for the two-state solution. Hopelessness on both sides has created an extremely volatile situation, characterized on both sides by disturbing insensitivity to the suffering of the other.

A PEACEKEEPING FORCE

Based on these premises, the United States should act soon to sponsor international intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the form of an armed peacekeeping force, ideally dispatched by the United Nations, to be inserted into the occupied territories. This form of international intervention offers the best hope of enforcing the two-state solution relatively quickly, with a minimum of further loss of life on both sides.

The peacekeepers would replace the Israeli army, which would withdraw from all of the occupied territories inside the pre-1967 borders of Israel. The peacekeepers must be empowered to stop, with force if necessary, Israeli military or Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians, as well as Palestinian attacks upon settlers and Palestinian attempts at infiltration into Israel proper to attack Israeli civilians with suicide bombings or other armed attacks. That power will be necessary to convince Israelis that the United Nations presence aims to protect them from outside attack, and to convince Palestinians that the United Nations presence is not just a new foreign occupation. In line with the latter objective, the peacekeepers would remove all of the internal checkpoints and roadblocks that currently constrain Palestinian travel and commerce between towns and villages and lift the current system of curfews that keeps many Palestinians trapped in their homes.

Most important, the peacekeepers need to be invested with a political mandate as well as a security mandate. They must not be a proxy Israeli army with a mandate only to dismantle Hamas and the other militant groups. They must not be a simple buffer between hostile combatants, as the United Nations force known as the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has been in the past. They must not be there merely to police a ceasefire between combatant forces that remain in place, as that would constitute a *de facto* legitimization of the Israeli occupation and place the peacekeepers in the crossfire. They must be empowered to do more than observe and report, so as not to repeat the unhappy experiment of the toothless Temporary International Presence in Hebron, which has been in place since 1997.

Effective peacekeepers need to go to the occupied territories with the explicit political purpose of ending the Israeli occupation and establishing favorable conditions for the two-state solution. That kind of deployment would enforce the spirit of successive U.N. resolutions.

The political mandate must adhere to a strict timetable set by the U.N. Security Council. There must be a peace at the end of the peace process. It cannot be a process for the sake of process, open to political manipulation by the negotiating parties and open to sabotage by external actors like Hamas, who no doubt will seek to sabotage it. If such a time-delimited political mandate were firmly endorsed by the international community and backed by the diplomacy of the United States, then public opinion on both sides could very well support final status negotiations aiming at the establishment of the two-state solution and the resolution of other outstanding issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the lack of hope on both sides for a negotiated peace today, polls continue to show with great regularity that majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians continue to believe that negotiation is the only way to achieve peace, and that the two-state solution is the best vision. Physical insecurity is the worst enemy of the basic core realism about the conflict among both Israelis and Palestinians.

Should the negotiations determine that Israeli settlements were to be removed, then United Nations peacekeepers might be required to stay and enforce their removal, as such a removal might be politically impossible for any Israeli government. Should the negotiations determine that Jewish settlements would remain as part of the state of Palestine, then United Nations peacekeepers might be required to stay and protect both the settlers and Palestinian civilians from the attacks of extremists in both the settlers' and the Palestinians' ranks. That function, however, should be turned over to the Palestinian police as soon as possible.

There is a risk that more ideological Israeli settlers in the West Bank would resort to violence to derail the mission of the peacekeeping force. Deployment of a peacekeeping force would probably not be cost-free, regardless of the identity of the peacekeepers. However, the majority of the settlers are living in the West Bank because the housing is cheaper, again made so by Israeli state policy. In the context of

a comprehensive settlement which relocated them to comparable housing in Israel proper, they would have absolutely no motivation to take up arms against peacekeepers. To preempt the risk of attacks from both Israelis and Palestinians, the paramount aspect of the peacekeeping mission must be its political mandate to enforce the two-state solution. There must be a strict timetable—when this settlement is evacuated, when that section of the border is set—and clearly defined political goals, so that any party attacking the peacekeepers is seen by both sides, and by world opinion, as a would-be saboteur of the political mandate. Again, this proposal is risky, but much less risky for Israelis, Palestinians, and regional stability than continuation of the status quo or, worse, the disappearance of the two-state solution as a realistic prospect. The further the international community allows the two-state solution to fade, the greater the likelihood of increased Israeli-Palestinian violence.

EAST TIMOR AS A PARTIAL MODEL FOR PALESTINE

U.N. intervention to ensure independence for East Timor makes for an interesting, if rather imprecise, comparison to the Palestinian case. As with the Palestinians, the world overwhelmingly supported East Timorese self-determination against the wishes of the occupying power, Indonesia, which also at the time was heavily backed by Washington. The United States and Australia both resisted deployment of an international force to safeguard East Timorese independence, because Indonesia did not accept it, the same reason that is always adduced for the American refusal to back proposals for an international presence in the occupied territories. Finally, though, reports from East Timor became so grim that the United States abruptly informed B. J. Habibie's government that aid was suspended. Three days later Jakarta relented, and today United Nations peacekeepers have successfully overseen East Timor's transition to statehood. The keys to the success of the East Timorese experiment were the very strict timetable and the clearly defined political goals.

One major difference between the two cases is Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians, particularly the gruesome suicide bombings. This is something that the East Timorese never did to the Indonesians. That is why U.N. peacekeepers in the occupied territories would need the power to disarm and, if necessary, arrest those Palestinian militants who probably would continue to target Israeli civilians during a genuine time-delimited peace process in order to derail it. The loyalty of radical elements within Hamas to an ideology which does not include a state of Israel would pose genuine political problems during a United Nations peacekeeping mission. But over time, the popular appeal of Hamas would diminish for the very simple reason that the occupation would be over. The source of the appeal of Hamas at present is that Palestinians see Hamas resisting occupation, while the

Palestinian Authority does nothing. With a peace process with peace at its end in place, Palestinians would rapidly come to see Hamas violence as an obstacle to peace. More moderate voices in Hamas might begin urging the group to participate in the process so as not to lose their political base and so as to be able to compete in future elections as a “normal” political actor. The risk of Hamas attacks against peacekeepers and/or their political mission is considerable but exponentially smaller than continuation of the status quo, which is making the stance of rejectionists within Hamas seem more and more appealing.

AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE PEACEKEEPERS

American policy should support the rapid deployment of such a peacekeeping force in the occupied territories. Ideally, the United States should not assume the task of peacekeeping itself, either unilaterally or in the guise of NATO. Unilateral intervention would have scant credibility among Palestinians, Arabs, and internationally—given the American history of opposing much less robust versions of international intervention, the level of American military and financial aid to Israel (despite its failure to comply with U.N. resolutions), and particularly the American administration’s intervention on Israel’s side during the three West Bank offensives of 2002. For the sake of the force’s credibility and its chances of success, the United States needs to support the United Nations in enforcing its own resolutions. Even if the peacekeepers had to be Americans exclusively, their mandate should come from the United Nations. The force should not be a unilateral political venture.

In any event, close American identification with the peacekeeping force is vital because of the leverage that the United States can bring to bear upon the Israeli government, which naturally will bitterly oppose suggestions of international intervention in the conflict. Israel’s resistance to the United Nations investigative commission for Jenin in April of 2002 will be many times magnified in the event of a serious proposal to introduce peacekeepers. Therefore, the Israeli government should not be allowed veto power over discussion of the idea, and should be given strong inducements to cooperate. American aid packages to Israel should be conditioned upon its acceptance of the framework outlined above, and the United States should vigorously promote international intervention in its diplomacy, explicitly as a way of saving the two-state solution for the mutual security of both Israelis and Palestinians.

A time-delimited process with clear political goals and security guarantees would garner significant support from the Jewish and Arab communities in the United States. American leadership in this area would also reawaken the Israeli peace camp, and give dovish elements of the Israeli Labor Party a concrete political platform from which to regain their electoral strength and a voice in the Israeli media. The settlements are deeply unpopular in Israel. If the Israeli government continued

to oppose this kind of peace deal, its opposition would increasingly look to Israelis in the moderate center as nothing but emotional attachment to settlements, which have very little to do with Israel's security.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

However it comes about, any kind of peace settlement has to include a substantial component of economic aid from the United States and the international community writ large. One big reason why is that this is the most practical way to deal with the refugee issue. Most people who have studied the refugee issue know that when Palestinians talk about the right of return, they do not envision that four million Palestinian refugees are going to come knocking on the doors of their old homes in Haifa. It is politically unfeasible for any Palestinian negotiator to sign away the right of return, which is guaranteed by United Nations Resolution 194, but Israeli recognition of the right would not mean that the right would be exercised. Most of the Palestinian refugees in the Arab world, particularly in Jordan, are very well integrated into the economy and even into politics. It is unlikely that they would want to come back. The same goes for the Palestinians living in the West.

The refugees who will need to be resettled are many of those living in the occupied territories and those living in Lebanon. Lebanon has a horrid history of dealing with Palestinian refugees. Lebanese law forbids Palestinians from holding seventy kinds of jobs. This law essentially consigns Palestinians born in Lebanon to lives of menial labor or attempts to get out by any means they can find. Those refugees will need to be resettled in the course of a comprehensive peace settlement. The most logical thing is that they would be resettled in the territory of the future Palestinian state. That is going to require lots of money. Also, under the resolution passed way back in 1948, refugees have a right to compensation for loss of their homes and property. That compensation will have to be paid. Israel should foot some of the bill, but it is very likely that the United States will need to pay a large chunk of it.

In the long term, for economic development in a future Palestinian state, one thing not sufficiently appreciated is that the economic codependency that once existed between Israelis and Palestinians has now gravely eroded. Israel formerly relied upon Palestinian labor, particularly in such fields as construction, and Palestinians relied upon those jobs for their income.

Those jobs, by Israeli state policy, have now been filled mostly with immigrants from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Southeastern Europe. Even after peace breaks out, the new Palestinian areas will need substantial foreign aid and foreign investment to create job opportunities. Some of that will have to come from the Palestinian diaspora. Some of it will have to come from other places in the Arab world and some from the West.

DOMESTIC POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES

America, of course, has a very daunting political environment for the discussion of sane solutions. Conservatives do not want to do anything to jeopardize the Christian right vote or a share of the Jewish vote.

Most people in the American Jewish community do not feel represented by the major organizations that claim to represent their interests in Washington. The leaders of those organizations stake out positions considerably to the right of the consensus among the American Jewish community.

But the Christian right is far more extreme in its views toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than anything but a small minority of the American Jewish community. For example, even before the announcement of the “road map,” there was a conference in Washington which brought together leaders from the Likud-supporting minority of the American Jewish community with the Christian right—specifically to lobby against the “road map.”

The solution is to advance bold ideas that can compete with the bold ideas of the right, as Gary Hart has articulated in chapter 1. The right does not have an unbreakable grip on public opinion when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and certainly not on American Jewish opinion, which supports a two-state solution and is mostly antagonistic to the settlements. What is missing from the political arena is a way forward that holds out hope of achieving a lasting peace with security guarantees for both Israelis and Palestinians. The road map, though it has positive elements, is not such a way forward. Both sides see it as something to be manipulated or endured until it collapses of its own weight, largely because the American government is so palpably uninterested in it.

CONCLUSION

The two-state solution is on life support. It is a dubious proposition that the road map, or any comparable initiative, can save it. The road map certainly cannot save the two-state solution without high-level American involvement in every stage of the process and substantial investment of the political capital of the presidency. This is very unlikely. Those of us who support peace in Israel-Palestine and a responsible role for the United States in the Middle East must advocate forcefully for a reversal of the traditional American unwillingness to internationalize the diplomacy of this conflict. Internationalization and meaningful intervention are the best hope for bringing peace to Israel-Palestine. The alternative could be much, much worse than the already unacceptable status quo.

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