

A real deal for peace in the Middle East.

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Forget the Road Map

A real deal for peace in the Middle East—once and for all.

Recent heartening developments in Aqaba, Jordan, especially conciliatory statements made by Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, reflect a strong willingness on the part of both Israel and the Palestinians to compromise in America's latest effort to bring peace to the Middle East. However, if the United States pursues its so-called "road map" in the region—the Palestinian-Israeli peace plan formulated by the European Union, the United Nations, Russia, and the United States—it will inevitably squander that good will. Like Oslo, the 1993 peace plan that tried in vain to create amity between the two parties while postponing resolution of their central disputes, the current road map represents a gradualist approach to a conflict that demands much more immediate and difficult action.

But not only does the road map show a slow route, it also lacks a destination. The plan promises to establish a viable Palestinian state by 2005 after a series of reciprocal steps on the part of both parties and two international conferences, but what this Palestinian state will look like is left unclear. In fact, none of the major issues facing Israel and the Palestinians—the status of Jerusalem, the future of Israeli settlers and Palestinian refugees, the establishment of borders, the guarantee of security—are addressed in concrete terms in the road map document. In my view, these core issues must be not only be addressed now; they must be resolved now. Guided only by a road map displaying a circuitous way to an unknown endpoint, both parties are bound to lose the confidence and momentum they currently have.

Peace in the Middle East is possible. But to achieve it, the United States and the international community must be willing, from the start, to commit both troops and money to the region. The following proposal specifically delineates the nature of the proposed Palestinian state and its relationship to Israel, as well as the futures of both nations. Polling data strongly suggests that such a proposal would be deemed acceptable by the vast majority of Palestinians and Israelis. Comprised of five interrelated points, the plan would herald a new era in the history of the Middle East, allowing the region to initiate desperately needed political and economic reforms.

1. Security: Israel's primary concern has always been security. In earlier periods it sought protection from neighboring Arab states and their armies. More recently, Israel has required protection from Palestinian terrorists and suicide bombers. A viable plan could ensure Israeli security by guaranteeing a completely nonmilitarized Palestinian state—monitored by the United States—and the establishment of a U.S.-Israeli Mutual Defense Pact committing the United States to preserving Israel's security. This defense agreement would include the stationing of American troops on the Palestinian side of the Israeli-Palestinian border. American GIs would be positioned in Palestinian territory for an initial period of five years; this, of course, could be extended. Three unobtrusive Israeli early warning stations would also be established in the new Palestinian state.

In the past, Israel has been wary of U.N. and European peacekeepers, and this part of the proposal would allow U.S. soldiers to instead guard Israel's Palestinian borders. The mutual defense pact would commit the United States to ensuring Israel's security.

2. Settlements and refugees: The issues of settlements and refugees would be addressed simultaneously through the establishment of a \$25 billion fund administered by the United Nations with primary contributions from the Arab Gulf states, Japan, European nations, and the United States. First, almost all Israeli settlements, with the exception of those in the immediate proximity of Jerusalem, would be dismantled. Since many settlers originally moved to the West Bank for reasons of space and affordable housing, the settlers would be generously compensated at well above market rates for returning to Israel. This plan provides this group with an economic incentive to move back to Israel. Their homes would then be purchased through the fund and made available to Palestinian refugees.

Other settlers in the West Bank and Gaza are there for religious or ideological reasons. No amount of money or

compensation will convince this group to leave. But like extremists on the other side, once peace becomes a tangible possibility, their ranks will decrease, their power will diminish, and they will become increasingly isolated. Israeli public opinion polls have consistently demonstrated that the majority of Israelis are willing to give up the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for peace and security.

This \$25 billion fund would also be used to compensate the overwhelming majority of Palestinian refugees who have no chance of returning to Israel. Palestinian refugees number above 4 million, making them one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Although many want to return to Israel, Israel's concern with maintaining the Jewish character of the state coupled with the demographic impossibility of accepting large numbers of non-Jews makes their return untenable. Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank, Gaza, and elsewhere, therefore, would also be compensated monetarily for the loss of their homes and in exchange for their right of return. Although some will see this as grossly inadequate, the majority of Palestinian refugees realize that there is virtually no possibility of their return to what is now Israel. Giving up their homes would be a major sacrifice on the part of Palestinians, but it's a necessary one if a realistic peace is to be achieved.

At the same time, Israel must acknowledge the grave injustice that has been done to Palestinian refugees. Recognizing the symbolic right of return would take the form of allowing a small number of Palestinians to return to Israel. Allowing 30,000 Palestinians to return each year over a period of 10 years—300,000 in total—would in no way jeopardize the Jewish character of the Israeli state while allowing a pragmatic compromise on one of the most difficult issues in the conflict. Staggering the return over a decade ensures that the demographic balance is not jeopardized.

3. The economics of peace: Lasting peace and security will be impossible without an economic future for the Palestinians brighter than the bleak economic present. President Bush's recently proposed U.S.-Middle East Free Trade Area, therefore, is the right idea. But 10 years—the amount of time Bush proposes for creating free trade—is much too long for the Palestinians to wait. This part of the proposal, therefore, calls for the immediate establishment of a free trade agreement between the new Palestinian state and Israel and the United States and the European Union. The agreement would allow Palestinian and Israeli exports into both the United States and the European Union without tariffs or taxes. Such an agreement would encourage investment in the new Palestinian state, creating jobs and establishing the economic foundations of lasting peace. Coupled with major programs funded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the economic viability of the new Palestinian state would be assured.

4. Jerusalem: Accepting much of what was already agreed upon during the Taba talks of January 2001, Jerusalem would become the capital of both the new Palestinian state and Israel. The state of Palestine would have sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, while Israel would retain sovereignty over Jewish neighborhoods. Additionally, Israel would administer Jewish settlements in Jerusalem built after 1967, except for those at Jebel Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud. Israel would also retain sovereignty over the Western Wall, while the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount would be administered by the Palestinian state. Both parties accept the principle that Jerusalem is important for Christians, Jews, and Muslims and that worshippers of all three faiths should have unimpeded access to the holy sites.

5. Borders and normalization: With the exception of certain areas around Jerusalem, which because of the demographic reality—the population is almost entirely Jewish—will be annexed and remain under Israeli sovereignty, the 1967 borders will constitute the borders between Israel and the new Palestinian state. In exchange for these annexed areas, the new Palestinian state will receive land in Israel of equal size and value. Such a plan provides for the territorial viability of the new Palestinian state, ensuring a lasting peace. The Golan Heights will return to Syria and the Shebaa Farms will return to Lebanon. In return, all Arab states will immediately recognize Israel, declare an end to all hostilities, and normalize relations with the Jewish state.

Finally, the United States will be asked to make sacrifices, providing both resources and soldiers to ensure the new peace, at least initially. This is a sacrifice well worth making, however, because for the United States, especially in a post-9/11 world, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has become a major national security issue. Until a just and comprehensive peace is achieved, the Palestinian issue will remain a lightning rod for anti-Americanism, fueling terrorism directed at the United States and U.S. interests worldwide. For our own self-interest, therefore, we must be willing to pay this price.

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