

TIME FOR A PALESTINIAN PEACE PROPOSAL:  
MUTUALLY AGREEABLE PERMANENT SEPARATION

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It is abundantly clear why Prime Minister Sharon has not put forward any proposal for dealing with final status issues. Sharon came into office rejecting almost all of the ideas put forward by President Clinton in December 2000. This included sharing Jerusalem, Palestinian control of the Haram al-Sharif, withdrawal from all of Gaza and most of the West Bank, territorial contiguity, and land swaps. On all of these issues, the American position is much closer to the Palestinian position than to Sharon's. Sharon's strategy is one of lowering expectations—he believes that if enough time goes by, perhaps a decade or more, Palestinians will settle for much less than what was proposed by Clinton, and largely accepted by Barak.

But if Sharon's motives for avoiding final status issues are clear, how does one explain the absence of any concrete diplomatic initiatives from the Palestinian side? Of course, one knows in advance that Sharon would reject any proposal that was acceptable to the Palestinians, but this is not the point. With a creative initiative the Palestinian leadership can shift the debate onto its strongest terrain—final peace arrangements. To do so would win widespread support within Europe and the United States, and would introduce a powerful new dynamic within Israeli politics.

What might a Palestinian proposal look like? One alternative is to come forward with a comprehensive plan that addresses all of the issues and proposes to end the conflict. For such a plan to be taken seriously it would have to be realistic about refugees—accepting that almost none will ever return to Israel itself, and accepting that Israel will never affirm, even in principle, a Palestinian right of return to Israel. In addition, a comprehensive plan would have to develop some creative way of dealing with the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount. Israelis are prepared to accept Palestinian control over the Haram; they would even accept joint sovereignty or say that it was under the Sovereignty of God. But they will not except that it is simply under the sovereignty of the Palestinian State.

If the Palestinian leadership is not prepared to put forward a comprehensive plan that addresses these issues in a way that is acceptable to a majority of the Israeli public, then there is another alternative. Make the Israelis an offer they can't refuse on the territorial question.

By a significant majority the Israeli public today favors unilateral separation. There are many variants of this idea, but they all have in common that Israel would unilaterally withdraw from some of the occupied territories, but not all of it. Possibly Israel would evacuate some settlements as well. And on some proposals, it would allow a Palestinian state to emerge on the territory left behind.

Despite public support, most Israeli security analysts oppose unilateral separation for three basic reasons. First, it gives up land, without getting peace in exchange. Second, because it involves only a partial withdrawal, it does not lead to stability. And third, as a response to violence, it will make heroes out of those who have led the attacks on Israel and will lead to even more attacks. For these reasons, despite public support, unilateral separation is unlikely to occur. Israel may build a security fence, but Israelis will be on both sides of it.

Suppose however, that the Palestinian leadership put forward the following plan for “mutually agreeable permanent separation”:

1. The issues of Jerusalem and refugees will be deferred until three years after a Palestinian

State emerges. At that time they will be taken up on a state-to-state basis with Jerusalem subject to the Clinton parameter, “What is Jewish will be Israeli, what is Arab will be Palestinian.”

2. Immediately, Israel and the Palestinians will enter into binding arbitration of the final territorial line that will separate the two states. The exact line will be determined by an Arbitration Panel, subject to the following framework:
  - The Palestinian State will include all of the Gaza Strip
  - It will include a minimum of 95% of the West Bank
  - Israel will provide territorial swaps of equal extent and equal quality for any part of the West Bank that is annexed to Israel.
  - The Palestinian State will have territorial contiguity, and a border with Jordan.
3. This determination of the final boundary can be made either by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, or by the Quartet (the US, the UN, Russia and the EU), or by a special commission under American auspices, such as the Mitchell Commission.
4. Once the boundary is determined, Israel will within 18 months evacuate all settlements on the Palestinian side, leaving the settlements in good condition. The value of the housing left behind will be counted as credit in any compensation arrangement dealing with the refugee problem.
5. When Israel evacuates the territory, a United Nations Trusteeship will go into place for twelve months. During this period of time a provisional government of the Palestinian state will be formed. The trusteeship will be lifted after twelve months provided that the new government:
  - Recognizes Israel as a Jewish State.
  - Accepts international monitors to ensure that there is no importation of weapons.
  - Demonstrates that it has de facto sovereignty by disarming all non-state actors.
  - Demonstrates its commitment to peaceful co-existence with Israel.
  - Accepts this territorial line as the end of the territorial dimension of the conflict, except for Jerusalem which will be subject to negotiation.
6. When the Trusteeship is lifted, the State of Palestine will join the community of nations, as symbolized through its admission to the United Nations. All further issues will be resolved through state-to-state negotiations, on a basis of mutual respect and equality.

A proposal of this sort would transform the conflict. Within Israel it would divide the hardliners who oppose genuine Palestinian statehood from the majority who are prepared to live in peace with a Palestinian state. Internationally, it would isolate the Sharon government in just the way he has tried to isolate the Palestinians. It would be a basis for massive support within Europe and the United States. Within Israel, the next Israeli elections would be a referendum on saying “Yes” to the Palestinians.

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If Iraq does not withdraw from Kuwait, there are two alternatives to the status quo. The United States can go to war or it can negotiate, as some of our European allies desire.

It is now clear that the war option is not very attractive. It would cost thousands of lives and risk a chemical weapons attack on Israel. Devastation of the oilfields in Saudi Arabia could be expected. And it would push to the fore radical forces across the Arab world from Morocco to Jordan. Even if killed, Saddam Hussein would be an Arab hero who stood up to the West.

Negotiations are a disaster of another sort. If Saddam Hussein obtains the oilfield and islands he is seeking, he emerges as a clear winner, able to transform Iraq into a regional economic/military superpower.

This brings us back to the status quo. Compared to the alternatives, it has a lot to offer. It avoids war and it involves a major setback to Saddam Hussein. Just how great this has been is not always appreciated. Consider his objectives in invading Kuwait:

- To incorporate Kuwait with its riches into Iraq.
- To attain higher oil revenues through higher world prices.
- To dominate the states of the Gulf region.
- To unify the Arab world under his leadership.
- To see Iraq emerge as a regional superpower.

On every point, the status quo represents a major setback. Iraq now has virtually no export earnings; Kuwait's \$100-billion portfolio remains in Kuwaiti hands; Saudi Arabia is protected against aggression; the Arab world is split in ways that make pan-Arabism a fantasy; Iraq's ability to gain military technologies from abroad has been eliminated; her international credit has been destroyed, and her future is bleak.

In short, the status quo is hardly a standoff; for Iraq it's a disaster. To deny Iraq the ability to export oil is to deny it an economic future.

Maintaining the blockade indefinitely has advantages. First, it necessitates that the world becomes serious about the nonproliferation of nuclear and biochemical weapons.

Second, a long-term embargo provides a nonviolent process that would erode the strength of the Iraqi military machine. An Iraq in economic duress cannot survive with a million-man army. Many will have to return to productive economic tasks.

Third, an indefinite blockade maintains a political environment in which US-Soviet cooperation is high, and new structures of international law may be developed.

Can an international quarantine be maintained indefinitely? On the central technical point, the answer is "Yes!" The United States, with a few ships, can keep tankers from carrying Iraqi oil. The pipelines out of Iraq are closed and there is Security Council authority for interdiction.

What about Saudi Arabia and the other Arab states? Would the coalition last? The Saudis are of mixed mind. Some want an attack on Iraq; others are concerned about the potential destruction of Saudi Arabia. But if the US decides against war, the Saudis haven't much choice. They are clearly better off with the status quo than they would be with concessions to Iraq and a US exit. The Saudis are under pressure because of the presence of US troops.

The US could ease the situation by bringing some of the troops home (there are far more than are needed for defensive purposes); placing the remainder under UN command, as we did in

Korea; announcing a plan for future reductions in troops, as they can be replaced by those from Moslem countries.

As for the threat of war recedes, oil prices will decline. Overall, the cost to the US economy will be far less than going to war. And so long as there is no war, Americans accept overseas commitments. US troops have been in Korea for decades, and in Europe even longer.

Finally, a low-key commitment to an international quarantine would deflate Saddam Hussein. Rather than a modern Saladin defending Arab lands against the West, he would emerge as an incompetent leader who has served his country and his party poorly. Under those circumstances, time may even bring political change inside Iraq.