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An Alternative Roadmap to Middle East Peace

Lok Sang HO*

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It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it.

And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.

Eleanor Roosevelt

*(1884-1962, American First Lady, Columnist, Lecturer,
Humanitarian)*

I. Introduction

Conflict in the Middle East has remained the top peace problem in the world for the greater part of the past century¹. During all this time peace efforts have been made from many fronts without success. Although these efforts have earned various people the Nobel Peace

* The author thanks RAN Yue, Paul Harris, and Peter Baehr for useful suggestions.

¹ The British first partitioned Palestine in 1922, cutting off Transjordan from the Palestine mandate of the League of nations, along with the announcement by Winston Churchill that the Mandate called for a Jewish home in Palestine. See "Final Status and Peace Plans for Israel and Palestine," for an introduction into the history of the conflict and the variety of peace initiatives.

Prize since 1950, peace in the Middle East has remained elusive.² The conflict has now spilled over to other regions and is widely regarded as instrumental to the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001.

The George W. Bush Administration in 2002 started to work on a new peace initiative. This was to be “a performance-based road map to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” Phase I would have brought an end to terror and violence, would have normalized Palestinian life and built democratic Palestinian institutions by May 2003. This would have been followed by a period of transition that would end by the end of 2003. The final phase would have established a “permanent status agreement and end of the conflict by 2004 to 2005.

Even though the roadmap contained some useful ideas it has now been proven an utter failure. This was to be expected as there was no operational action plan that provided incentives on either side to at least take one step at a time to bring about peace. Instead, Under Secretary Marc Grossman stressed right at the beginning that "the first obligation has to be upon the Palestinians to do all they can to stop the terrorism." (October 24, 2003) There was, first of all, no

² Among earners are Ralph Bunche, Professor, Harvard University, Director of the UN Division of Trusteeship, Acting Mediator in Palestine in 1948, 1950 Prize; Mohamed Anwar Al-Sadat, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and Menachem Begin, Prime Minister of Israel, 1978 Peace Prize; and Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO, President of the Palestinian National Authority, Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, 1994 Peace Prize.

way to tell if the Palestinians had done “all they can to stop the terrorism.” Indeed, given that terrorist attacks could not realistically be expected to stop altogether overnight regardless of the effort it would be impossible to determine objectively if the Palestinians had done so. Moreover, putting the burden in the first place on the Palestinians to stop the terrorism also appears to be siding with Israel. A workable roadmap to peace would require a plan that is even-handed both in appearance and in essence, one that takes a step at a time, and one that provides incentives on both sides to follow the roadmap by offering tangible advantages for any real progress toward peace.

The importance of peace in the Middle East to world peace is beyond any question. Tens of millions of people had demonstrated in various cities in February 2003 ahead of the US operations in Iraq in an unprecedented demonstration of unity of purpose. People have now come to realize that there is really no security for the world without peace in the Middle East. The sheer volume of resources now devoted to security in the United States³ and elsewhere has bordered on the absurd, given the world’s needs to

³ “The Fiscal Year 2004 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security is \$36.2 billion. This represents a 7.4 percent increase in funding over FY2003, and a 64 percent increase (\$14.1 billion) over FY2002, with over 60 thousand staff added to protect our country. The consolidation of these entities into the new Department is the largest federal reorganization in more than 50 years.” See Press Release on Homeland Security Budget: Protecting the Homeland: Fiscal Year 2004 Budget, at <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=443>.

combat AIDS, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, human trafficking, and poverty.

II. An Alternative Roadmap: What It Takes

In order to be successful we need to be realistic and appreciate what is feasible and what is not. Although one could always argue that nobody knows whether something was feasible without trying, the truth is that we would be wasting valuable time if we ignored our constraints and spent time working on something totally infeasible.

A workable Middle East peace plan must involve the coexistence of both the state of Israel and the state of Palestine⁴ and the respect on either side regarding the other's existence. It must involve defining or redefining the border between these two states. This must involve gives and takes on both sides and must recognize some basic needs on either side, such as the need to have a country that is whole and contiguous rather than one that is divided up into pieces and patches. It must realize that rebuilding peace and trust takes time, so that realistically neither side can within a short period stop all violence sporadically levied upon the other by individuals. It must offer tangible benefits on either side for an extra effort to bring about peace. The benefits should not only be measurable but

⁴ It is unlikely that any other solution, such as a federal state involving both Israel and Palestinian territories or a "no state solution", would be acceptable, since having a sovereign state whose sovereignty and security are respected is very important to both Israelis and Palestinians.

should also be actually measured and thus appreciated. *Any progress in peace should also be measured and closely monitored.*

To say that the plan is workable is not to say that it is easy. The greatest difficulty lies in the existence of various militant or even extremist groups on both sides. These groups simply do not believe in any chances of a peaceful resolution. They may even understand that a military resolution is also not an option because there is none. But they want to do the utmost they can to levy the biggest harm on the other side. When the other side avenges, it only reinforces their prior belief that a peaceful resolution is out of question.

It is clear that converting these militant groups into believing in a peaceful resolution is a Herculean task. It takes a track record and thus time to change long-held views. Moreover, because they are so distrustful of the other side, the need for a mediator that is respected and trusted by both sides is paramount. This particular role, unfortunately, notwithstanding President Bush's expressed wishes, the United States simply cannot fill. The United States has long been perceived by many as siding with Israel. Since these people's perceptions and behaviors matter a lot with regard to the success or failure of the peace process, for the plan to have any chances of success the United States has to accept a different role. Taking on a more minor role in the mediation process than it does

now paradoxically may be the greatest contribution the United States can make toward establishing Middle East peace.

Admittedly, the United Nations is not a disinterested international arena with like minds trying to solve common problems. However, it still commands greater legitimacy over any other conceivable alternatives for the task of mediation. One possibility is a special task force or committee under the United Nations with representation from Russia, China, and the European Union. If the United States and the United Kingdom need to be involved for political or practical reasons, it is important that neither of them has veto power and that both must abide by the same rules that apply to the other members. Having a larger number of equal members in the task force will help quench impressions of domination and may inspire greater confidence.

To be fair to Israel, which clearly has legitimate concerns for security, it is necessary to provide a credible assurance that giving up Israel-occupied land today will not undermine Israel security.

Finally, the plan has to be credible. Predetermining a timeline sooner than we are ready for it could render it incredible.

III. The Proposal

Although we do not, for reasons just explained, at this point have a timeline for the establishment of peace in the Middle East, an operational plan will be in place to establish more peace by the month. Central to this peace plan are incentives that translate into immediate rewards for restraining terrorist attacks and the offer of clear and immediate advantages to both sides for a genuine peace effort. However, both sides must make a commitment not to over-react to isolated, unorganized attacks, which understandably will continue for some time. Rather than for the offended side to counter-attack, it will be up to the authorities on the offending side to track down and to hold offending individuals responsible for their criminal activities. The details of the plan include nine elements:

First is the establishment of a UN committee with both Palestinian and Israel representation called the Middle East Peace Project Team. Its responsibilities are to distinguish between isolated attacks and organized attacks, to enforce a commitment on the part of the Israel not to respond militarily to isolated (i.e., unorganized) attacks on Israel and its people, to see to it that Israel only respond to organized attacks militarily with calculated risks of injury to Palestinian non-militants, to ensure that Israel make concrete steps to gradually withdraw its forces from Palestinian soil up to the 1967 boundary. One key ingredient to make the new initiative operational is that the MEPPT will construct, calculate, and

announce a Palestinian Offensive Index (POI) and an Israeli Offensive Index (IOI) using transparent formulae.⁵ The former will measure the degree of organized Palestinian attacks on Israel, while the latter will measure degree of organized Israeli attacks on Palestinians. The sum of the two indices will provide an index on Middle East Peace Progress.

The second point draws on the Bush road map to construct democratic and civilized institutions in the new Palestinian state to be established. These institutions, including a constitution drawn up by Palestinians, must be acceptable to the Palestinians and will include the protection of basic human rights and the establishment of the rule of law. The new Palestinian state will have its boundaries gradually extended up to the 1967 boundary lines.⁶

Third is Israel and US aid to help reconstruction in the new Palestinian state. The aid will be unconditional, but the MEPPT will make sure that the money will be spent on reconstruction.

⁵ A possible formula for the POI could be $(a \times \text{Number of Injuries Inflicted on Israel Land} + b \times \text{Number of Fatalities Inflicted on Israel Land}) \times W + (a \times \text{Number of Injuries Inflicted on Palestinian Land} + b \times \text{Number of Fatalities Inflicted on Palestinian Land})$, where W is a number greater than 1. A similar formula applies for the IOI.

⁶ According to a public opinion poll jointly sponsored by the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University in Houston and the International Crisis Group in Washington, DC, 53.3 percent of Israelis polled said they would support such a proposal while 43.9 percent said they would oppose it. On the Palestinian side, 55.6 percent expressed support. Other polls gave the proposals about 30 percent support in Israel. See <http://www.mideastweb.org/peaceplans.htm>.

Fourth is that Israel stops all new settlement activities at once and halt further construction of the security wall. In return, a Council of Islamic Nations as well as the United Nations will pledge respect of Israel sovereignty over the re-defined Israel territories and its rights for self-defense. It is important to seek the support of Islamic Nations to restrain possible attacks on Israel by Islamic extremists.

Fifth is that Israel will dismantle the security wall⁷ at a steady, significant pace for as long as the monthly Palestinian Offensive Index is declining. Palestinians will respect that Israel has the right to stop dismantling the wall in the month following a rise in the POI.

Sixth is that Israel has the right to stop withdrawing its forces in the month POI fails to decline. But as long as the POI is declining Israel will continue to withdraw its forces from “Palestinian territory” at a steady, material pace.

Seventh is an official commitment to outlaw any hate propaganda against each other.

⁷ The security wall has succeeded in reducing the number of suicide bomber attacks. However, the security wall so disrupts the life of Palestinians and conflicts with the integrity of Palestinian state that it cannot be a permanent solution to Israel’s long term security, which can only be assured with a happy neighbor and not a disgruntled neighbor.

Eighth is that Palestinians will be given the right to visit their ancient monuments and relics in Israel subject to security checks.

Ninth is that Palestinians will be given the right to work and live in Israel subject to security checks and an offer of employment.

The entire process could take 10 years or 20, but progress will be for everyone to see and for every Palestinian and Israeli to enjoy. Because the POI and IOI are both objectively measured and an improvement will benefit all the stakeholders, both the Palestinians and Israelis will have the incentive to make progress on these fronts. Once the process starts to take hold it will gather momentum, allowing prosperity and peace to grow.

IV. American Foreign Policy and Security

The Chinese sage Laozi had this to say in the highly respected *Daodejing*:

Big nations should be like a stream that flows low.

In relating to other nations under heaven.

They should be like a female animal.

Female animals often lie low and still.

By doing so they win over male animals.

This advice seems even more valid with superpowers like the United States. An unassuming approach, with multilateralism replacing unilateralism, with humanitarian assistance and humanistic considerations replacing military supremacy and corporate interest considerations, will win the hearts of other countries. America had drawn much grievance and criticisms from other nations in the way it dominated the process for awarding contracts for rebuilding Iraq. Its unilateral decision to go to war in Iraq in the first place is the key reason behind other nations' reluctance in sending troops to keep peace and help restore order in Iraq today.

The suggestion for the United States to take on a lower profile, particularly a supporting role rather than a principal mediator's role, in the negotiations towards peace may be hard to swallow for Americans. But if this approach works and United States is seen to be instrumental in achieving Middle East peace and generous in assisting reconstruction, the world will see the United States as a true leader. When it is respected as such, the United States will have fewer enemies—which is the true basis not only for homeland security but for the security of Americans traveling all over the world.

The 9/11 Report, which was issued in 2004, warned that the United States had never before been subjected to such threats as it is today. This is quite an irony after so much has been expended in the “fight against terror.” American companies have been hesitant

in making major investments and at least partly for this reason have not been hiring as many as they would otherwise. A change in America's foreign policy will make a great difference to all this.

V. Conclusions

We have identified the greatest stumbling block to Middle East peace as the military/ extremist groups both on the Palestinian side and on the Israeli side. Because of their strong distrust of the other side, they have given up any hope for peaceful resolution and do not believe in any "roadmap" to peace. Because of their distrust of the peace process they may even regard any self-proclaimed "roadmap" as a conspiracy at their expense and may try to sabotage the peace process.

There is, therefore, a clear need for the emergence of a mediator that is trusted by both sides. It is highly recommended that the United States steer away from this role as far as possible, given the widespread perception of its traditional siding with Israel. When it does, the entire scheme will win the trust of the Palestinians. Even though the United States abstains from direct involvement in the role as an arbitrator or mediator, it may still provide expert advice in regard to such things as the formulation of the constitution and the law, and it may provide aid in support of economic and social development. In this capacity it still can be a great contributor to Middle East peace.

Certainly Israel may worry when United States, which has been its principal ally, stays away from the mediation process toward a peace resolution. But the bottom line is that the mediating team is committed to respecting both the security and sovereignty needs of Israel, and Israel will in the end find peace and true security on Israeli land as of 1967. As long as this bottom line is effective, i.e., if the entire world stands behind Israel on these rights, what is there to fear?

References

“Final Status and Peace Plans for Israel and Palestine” contains the best information readily available on line covering the background of the conflict and the various peace efforts made to date. See:

<http://www.mideastweb.org/peaceplans.htm>