

15 December 2002

THE QUARTET, THE ROAD MAP, AND THE FUTURE OF IRAQ: A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT

Gerald M. Steinberg

Summary: The Middle East "road map," designed to implement the peace initiative presented by President Bush on June 24, 2002, is based on a number of extremely optimistic assumptions, and successful implementation depends on fundamental changes in the environment:

- The full cooperation of the main partners in the Quartet (the U.S. and the European Union, with the support of the UN and Russia) is essential, and strong differences that plagued past peace efforts must be resolved. In this context, the structural chaos and lack of expertise that characterizes EU policy in the Middle East, and the high levels of suspicion and distrust in relations between the EU and Israel, and also between the UN and Israel, must be reduced substantially.
- The reliance on monitors from the Quartet to insure an end to all acts of terrorism and to enforce and verify the security agreements lacks credibility, particularly in light of the failure to act to disarm Hizballah following the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000.
- Implementation of central components, such as the total end to Palestinian incitement to hatred, and the establishment of effective security mechanisms to prevent terror, are predicated on sweeping changes in the Palestinian leadership and the removal of Yassir Arafat from power. This is unlikely to occur without a fundamental change in the external environment, either through Israeli action (for example, following a mega-terror attack), or as an indirect result of regime change in Iraq (with or without a war), triggering regional moves toward democratization, including in the Palestinian Authority. Without large-scale political changes, the Quartet's highly optimistic road map is destined to become another in the series of failed Middle East peace efforts.

Origins of the Road Map / Substantive Dimensions: A Road Map Going Backwards? / A Changed Israeli Perspective / Structural Dimensions: The Discordant Quartet / Europe's Failed Diplomacy in Lebanon / Empowering the EU to be a Judge of the Road Map? / Optimistic Assumptions and Realistic Alternatives

Origins of the Road Map

In the wake of the failed Camp David summit of July 2000 and the terrible violence that began at the end of September, there have been many efforts to halt the carnage and revive the negotiations. These efforts included summit meetings in Paris and Sharm el Sheik, the Mitchell Commission, and security plans presented by CIA director George Tenet and General Anthony Zinni. None of these had any visible impact, and the Palestinian attacks and Israeli responses have only intensified.

In March and April 2002, a devastating series of bombings (including the Passover eve attack in the Park Hotel in Netanya) killed over 100 Israelis and led to the long-delayed IDF occupation of Palestinian cities, designed to locate and dismantle the terror networks. In the wake of this violence, and visits to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Powell and other senior officials, another effort began with the goal of ending the violence and restarting political discussions. On June 24, 2002, U.S. President Bush presented a new approach that emphasized a halt to Palestinian terror attacks and to the incitement behind them, as well as the fundamental reform of the Palestinian Authority, including implementation of democratic practices and ending Yassir Arafat's dominance. These measures would pave the way for a temporary Palestinian state to be followed by a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian agreement based on mutual acceptance of "the two-state solution" within three years.

The implementation of this proposal was not to be based on a unilateral American effort, but rather was designed to lead the international "Quartet" (formally established in the Fall of 2001) in a coordinated policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Responding to a long history of differences and conflicts that reduced the impact of their collective influence, the U.S., the 15-member European Union, the UN, and Russia sought to work together, much as they had done in convening the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. Although the U.S. was and remains the dominant force, the other members of the Quartet were also expected to use their relative influence.

In order to translate the contents of the Bush plan into a specific policy, a more detailed "road map" was required. The Quartet's meetings of July 16 and September 17 officially and formally endorsed the Bush approach, but behind the scenes, the old differences reemerged, and the battles lines were drawn. After an intense internal debate in Washington between the State Department and other members of the policy-making community (DOD, NSC, Congress, etc.), and among the Quartet's participants, the U.S. government began to circulate a draft "road map" for comment. After the media released reports that claimed to include central details, officials in both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government made public references to the plan. In October, Prime Minister Sharon declared, "It's not credible that Israel takes irreversible steps while the other side only makes statements. There is a danger Israel will face a timetable that only it is required to keep to."¹ In contrast, again according to media reports, top IDF officials supported the overall framework and recommended general Israeli approval for this initiative. A second draft was reportedly circulated in November, and the official Palestinian daily *Al Ayyam* published the purported text.²

By this time, Israel was in the midst of national elections, and many of the issues that were central to the road map were also brought into the campaigns. In the Likud leadership contest, Netanyahu attacked Sharon's willingness to accept the creation of a Palestinian state as part of the process, and rejected commitments regarding IDF redeployment prior to a complete end to terror. Netanyahu also criticized promised gains for the Palestinians that could be seen as rewards for violence. In contrast, Labor party candidate Amram Mitzna was criticized for basing his campaign on a return to negotiations, even without an end to terrorism.

In order to avoid entangling sensitive discussions on the road map with the dynamics of the Israeli election campaign, the Israeli government pressed the U.S. to delay these discussions until after the polls on January 28. However, the preparations continue, as does the public debate.

Substantive Dimensions: A Road-Map Going Backwards?

In terms of its broad outline, this "performance-based" plan, with a series of measurable "benchmarks" and "milestones" (in the best spirit of social engineering and what Prof. Stanley Hoffman once referred to as "skill thinking"), consists of three phases, leading to the establishment of a "democratic Palestinian state" living "side-by-side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbors," and to a "final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005," as outlined by President Bush.

The first phase, to last until May 2003, is to focus on ending the terrorism and violence, and transforming the structure of the Palestinian Authority.³ The one-man rule of Yassir Arafat is to be replaced by a broad-based Palestinian cabinet, including an empowered prime minister, and the establishment of an independent election commission and a committee to draft a constitution. The new Palestinian leadership will then revive the pledge issued by Yassir Arafat in September 1993 (and quickly violated), unequivocally recognizing the legitimacy of Israel, and declaring an end to all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere. Guidelines and monitoring mechanisms for ending Palestinian incitement against Israel will be issued, and the Arab states are expected to "move decisively to cut off public/private funding of extremist groups."

On this basis, many of the parameters of the original Oslo process will be resurrected, including international funding for Palestinian institutions, the consolidation and rebuilding of Palestinian security forces (under a cabinet minister), and the resumption of security cooperation with Israel (based on the Tenet plan), perhaps under the joint supervision of the U.S., Egypt, and Jordan.

The road map calls for the collection of tens of thousands of illegal weapons and all of the explosive stockpiles, and the disarming of terrorist groups. VIP and travel permits for Palestinian officials will be restored, and the IDF will be expected to lift the curfews and remove the roadblocks between Palestinian areas. As this process proceeds, the IDF is to withdraw "progressively" from Palestinian Authority territory as created under the interim agreements of the Oslo framework, and then, "free, open, and fair" Palestinian elections are to take place. As a sign of regional support for this process, Egypt and Jordan will return their ambassadors, while Israel will allow Palestinian political offices in Arab sections of Jerusalem to reopen.

If all of these extremely ambitious actions are successfully implemented, the road map calls for the second phase to begin in mid-2003, with the aim of creating a Palestinian state "with provisional borders" by end of the year. Israel would be required to halt all settlement activity, as specified in the Mitchell Commission report, and some territorial transfer may take place to provide contiguity to the Palestinian state in formation. The ever-present concept of an international conference plays a central role in this most optimistic of Middle East peace plans, including peace negotiations involving Syria and Lebanon, and the resumption of the five "multilateral working groups."

For those whose credulity has not been strained by the expectations of the first two phases, the third, to begin in 2004, is designed to complete the process. A second conference will be held, "to launch negotiations toward a final, permanent status resolution in 2005." The Arab states will then commence normal relations with Israel, as pledged in the Saudi Initiative and the Beirut Arab League Summit.

A Changed Israeli Perspective

In contrast to the very short time frame envisioned in this scenario, the deep scars left by the smoldering ruins of Oslo, with huge costs borne by both Israeli and Palestinian societies, will take years, if not decades, to heal. While the Oslo agreements were negotiated in an atmosphere of cooperation and what was at least thought to be a common vocabulary and frame of reference, these conditions are no longer present and will not be restored in the foreseeable future.

Instead, the atmosphere is characterized by a profound sense of distrust and suspicion. From the dominant Israeli perspective, as reflected in public opinion polls and other evidence, the Palestinian and wider regional goal is now perceived to be the delegitimization and ultimate destruction of the Jewish state, and not "the end of the occupation" and "two states for two peoples." Internationally, evidence of the political and ideological goal of demonizing Israel is seen in the "Durban Process" and many other activities led by the Arab bloc and conducted via the United Nations that single out Israel as an "apartheid" or otherwise illegitimate state. In addition, the impact of virulent and pervasive anti-Semitism throughout the region, including the Egyptian television program based on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* forgery, has been profound. Similarly, Yassir Arafat and official Palestinian media are leading a campaign to erase 3,000 years of Jewish history in Jerusalem.

The hatred and incitement have created broad-based demands in Israel for concrete evidence of fundamental societal changes before any move toward the creation of a Palestinian state. Without a deep-rooted transformation, the Israeli consensus fears that a sovereign Palestinian entity would expand the continuing war against Israel into a genocidal assault.

Structural Dimensions: The Discordant Quartet

In attempting to understand and analyze the potential impact of the road map, structural issues related to the Quartet are at least as important as substantive ones. It is the Quartet, albeit with a dominant U.S. role, that will be responsible for monitoring each phase, stage, and performance-based benchmark.

Initially, the concept of the Quartet, as an institution, was widely welcomed because it provided a collective umbrella that tied the U.S. and Europe (as well as the UN and Russia) together in an effort to halt the history of competing peace initiatives and policies in the Middle East. In reality, however, the standard competition was merely transferred to the internal debates held by the Quartet. In this process, the clear policy statement and requirements presented in President Bush's June 24 speech were muddled by European-led opposition (apparently joined by the U.S. State Department and reinforced by the UN Secretariat).

European foreign policy, in general, with respect to the Middle East, is chaotic both in terms of structure and substance. The tensions and differences in interests of the fifteen EU nations, and the collective policy-making bodies in Brussels (the Commission, represented by Chris Patten, and the CFSP mechanism, headed by Javier Solana), produce a policy based on the lowest common denominator, including opposition to "American hegemony." EU diplomacy has failed to prevent or resolve the conflicts in the Balkans without U.S. intervention, or to respond to the preparations for massive killings in Central Africa, and yet these officials are fully confident in their ability to know how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In addition, relations between Israel and Europe (not only with respect to the EU) are at an all-time low (and growing worse), and this factor cannot be divorced from Israeli responses to the road map and the Quartet. While all of the American officials that had been deeply involved in

the Oslo process have since departed from the scene (many have also admitted their failures in not recognizing or responding to Arafat's lack of commitment to peace), the European officials and their public perceptions remain largely unchanged. Miguel Moratinos, the European Commission's special envoy to the Middle East, continues to hop between the salons of the region, without any impact. One-sided condemnations of Israel as well as incidents and reflections of anti-Semitism in Europe are growing, and these add to the distrust.⁴

Nowhere is the problematic nature of European policy toward Israel more blatant than in the bodies of the United Nations, especially the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. This UN body, made up of 53 member-states that include China, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, is charged with monitoring human rights around the world. On April 15, 2002, it adopted yet another anti-Israel resolution on the "Question of the Violation of Human Rights in the Occupied Arab Territories, Including Palestine." Besides stating that it "strongly condemns" Israel, the resolution "affirms the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to resist Israeli occupation." In the context of 2002, this language provided justification for suicide bombings against Israeli civilians. Yet a number of European states, including Austria, Belgium, and France, supported the resolution, as well as similar propaganda efforts in the UN General Assembly and other bodies.

After years of almost religious faith that comprehensive peace was inevitable, the EU's policies in the Middle East have collapsed with the Palestinian Authority. Through the lens of European media coverage, the statements and policies of diplomats and officials, and the deep involvement of NGOs (often supported by governments), Israelis see a hostile and entirely unsupportive opponent, which has adopted the myths of the Palestinian version of history that begins in 1967 with "occupation" and "settlements," and includes blaming Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton for the failures of Oslo and Camp David.

Similarly, while the U.S. government refused to participate in the 2001 Durban "summit on racism" (held under the auspices of the UN), which was itself a vehicle for anti-Semitism and the demonization of Israel, Europeans (both governments and NGOs, such as Amnesty International) participated and gave legitimacy to this activity. At the same time, the EU is accused of blindly funding Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, without accountability (although demands by members of the European Parliament for an investigation of this funding are growing).

In the dominant European vision, Palestinian violence can be brought to an end and stability restored by forcing Israel to "end the occupation" and accept other Palestinian demands (including refugee claims). Given the sympathy for Palestinian victimization, and in sharp contrast to the Americans, Europe has never taken fundamental Israeli security requirements, including "secure and defensible borders," very seriously. Indeed, in the road map, the absence of references to basic Israeli strategic requirements, and the emphasis on the creation of an independent Palestinian state, as Dennis Ross has pointed out,⁵ reflects this continuing bias.

EU officials and statements also continue to repeat the Palestinian emphasis on the creation of an international force to implement and monitor the terms of a peace agreement, while ignoring the clear obstacles to implementation of this approach, as well as the multiple past failures of such an approach to bring peace or stability, particularly in Lebanon since May 2000. In other words, discussions about international monitoring mechanisms to stop Palestinian attacks and prevent the rebuilding of terror networks have absolutely no credibility, but remain at the core of the EU's road map concepts.

Europe's Failed Diplomacy in Lebanon

European diplomacy has utterly failed in southern Lebanon. Israel withdrew from Lebanon unilaterally during 2000, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425. The Security Council recognized Israel's withdrawal as complete, but the EU had to impact on Syrian and Lebanese support for Hizballah's attacks beyond the internationally-recognized "blue line" border. In addition, the EU adamantly refuses to recognize Hizballah as an international terrorist organization. In December 2002, Prime Minister Tony Blair, the most pro-American EU leader, invited Syrian president Bashar Assad to London, despite Syria's continuing support of international terrorist groups. Given this background, there is good reason for Israeli rejection of any proposal that relies on European judgments regarding Palestinian terrorist attacks.

Indeed, over the years, EU diplomats have consistently avoided adequately addressing Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians in their public comments and policy proposals. Europeans also tend to avoid scenarios based on direct negotiation and agreement between Israel and the PA, but, instead, seek "decisive American pressure on Israel," including the use of military aid and other forms of leverage. (In contrast, since Europe provides essentially no support for Israel, and has, in many cases, blocked the export of defensive weapons, it also has no leverage.) This image also angers Israelis, who are placed in the role of a pliant colony in which democracy is no more than a facade. Europe's structural links with Israel are tied to the 1995 Barcelona framework, in which all the members, including Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and the North African countries, have the same status. This framework allows the EU to shove Israeli democracy and its open society under the same rubric as the repressive regimes of Egypt and Syria.

The language and substance of the European Council's December 2002 Declaration on the Middle East (Annex III of the Copenhagen conclusions) deepen these divisions. This declaration repeats many of the pro-Palestinian terms of reference that Israelis view as reflecting Europe's simplistic and biased approach. For example, EU policymakers again condemn "excessive use of force" and "extra-judicial killings," and declare that these measures "do not bring security to the Israeli population." However, from an Israeli perspective, such statements are fundamentally patronizing and simply wrong-headed. They are also in conflict with U.S. and Russian perspectives regarding the necessary military tactics to be employed in the war on terrorism. Similarly, the EU's condemnation of suicide bombings is strictly pragmatic ("Suicide attacks do irreparable damage to the Palestinian cause"), without any recognition of the basic immorality of such brutality.

Empowering the EU to be a Judge of the Road Map?

Yet despite the background of European bias against Israel, the road map empowers the Quartet to be the judge of whether the Palestinians have fulfilled their commitments to the Israeli side, particularly in the sensitive area of security. When Palestinian behavior is considered to have been acceptable, the parties are expected to move on to the next phase of the road map's implementation. Based on past behavior, Europeans might well conclude that the Palestinians have made a 100 percent effort to fight terrorism, when in fact they have only taken symbolic steps. Or the Europeans may state that most of the illegal Palestinian firearms have been collected, when only a fraction has been turned in, simply in order to press Israel to make fundamental concessions on settlements and territory, even in the absence of the required security conditions. Such concerns reinforce many years of Israeli policy opposing, for good reason, allowing any outside power to become the arbiter of its core security requirements.

Taken together, these factors have created a deepening crisis in relations between the EU and Israel and have blocked any positive influence. Before Israel will agree to any significant European role, this relationship needs an honest and fundamental reassessment, with new structures and different people not wedded to the old myths that have contributed to the demonization of Israel. Similarly, the relationship between the UN and Israel is also at a nadir, with conflicts over the role of UN organizations such as UNRWA in providing support or

allowing itself to be used by Palestinian terror groups, as well as accusations regarding the death of an UNRWA worker during a battle in Jenin. In the absence of changes in these relationships involving the EU and the UN, their roles in formulating and implementing any new peace efforts will be severely restricted.

Optimistic Assumptions and Realistic Alternatives

After 27 months of terrorism and response, with so many terrible acts of murder and suffering that has affected and ruined the lives of so many people, it is hard to take the Quartet's road map seriously. The entire process, with its performance-based benchmarks and milestones, hinges first and foremost on a fundamental change in Palestinian leadership. None of this will even begin to take place unless Yassir Arafat, who has essentially been in power for almost four decades, disappears from the scene. Reforms, transformations, commissions, elections, laws, etc. will all be meaningless as long as Arafat continues to pull the strings.

In the six months since Bush delivered his speech, Arafat has shown no signs of leaving voluntarily, and while his support seems to be weakening, the collapse may be slow and painful for all. In the event of a mega-terror attack, Israel may decide to act unilaterally to totally isolate Arafat or perhaps send him into exile, but this is certainly not a preferred strategy.

In order to begin this radical and unprecedented process, as outlined in the road map, it is necessary to tear down existing power structures and societal norms that prevent the necessary transformations, so that new ones may develop. Such an event could be provided by a successful regime change in Iraq, with, or perhaps without, an American-led war. Upon witnessing the crumbling of the old Arab order in Iraq and beyond, and perhaps even the development of an embryonic liberal democracy (hard to imagine, given the cultural and historical barriers in the region), the Palestinian elite and perhaps the general public may also seize the opportunity, with some outside help from the Quartet and donor countries, and begin to move in the desired direction of acceptance of Israeli legitimacy and forcing an end to terrorism. However, it would be unwise to rely on this scenario as the only option for ending the plague of terror and restoring stability in the region.

Therefore, it is also imprudent to assume that the road map will develop into anything more than yet another Middle East peace fantasy, in the tradition of many others, including the Oslo framework. In the seven years of the Oslo process, the U.S. government, and, to a much greater degree, the European governments, failed to prepare any alternatives in the event of failure. European policy in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, as embodied in the Barcelona ("Euromed") framework, was based entirely on the assumption of Middle East peace anchored by a successful Oslo process. When Oslo collapsed, Europe was left without a policy or a framework for the region.

A more realistic, alternative approach for the members of the Quartet than the road map scenario would be an approach based on small steps and limited goals, focusing on re-establishing stability, reducing friction, ending the violence, and preventing a full-scale regional explosion. This would require an entirely different approach, including providing support for disengagement (with or without a negotiated agreement), exploration of trusteeship plans for the Palestinian Authority, or perhaps even a temporary return to full Israel control. None of these options are by any means optimal, but in the real world, and in the Middle East in particular, the best choice is often the least damaging approach.

* * *

Notes

1. Aluf Benn, "Sharon Blasts US 'Road Map' -- Irreversible Israeli Steps and Only Palestinian Talk," *Ha'aretz*, October 23, 2002.

2. "Elements of a Performance-Based Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 15, 2002; and "The Text of the Amended Draft of the 'Roadmap'," *al-Ayyam*, November 17 2002, posted by (the Palestinian) Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, <http://mail.jmcc.org/new/02/nov/roadmap.htm>

3. *Ibid.*

4. Gerald M. Steinberg, "Europe Badly Needs a Change of Course," *Jerusalem Post*, November 28, 2002.

5. Dennis Ross, "Mapping Out Peace in the Mideast," *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 2002.

* * *

Gerald M. Steinberg is a Fellow of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and Director of the Program on Conflict Management and Negotiation at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.