

Memo

To : Dr. Saab Erakat
From : NSU
Date : 29.2.2004
Re : Gaza Withdrawal Plan

Introduction:

The Israeli plan of a unilateral withdrawal from some Gaza settlements presents opportunities as well as risks. To maximize the opportunities and minimize the risks, certain conditions must be put in place.

Risks

A purely unilateral withdrawal that is not coordinated with the PA may result in:

- Weakening the PA, by undermining its political line of ending the conflict through negotiations, by being perceived as a victory for violent elements, and by further eroding its central authority.
- Weakening the Road Map, by defeating its logic as a set of cumulative, mutually supportive measures, and by creating the perception that the Road Map is being replaced by a new plan. The ultimate goal of the Road Map – a negotiated two-state solution – will also be undermined.

Opportunities

If placed in the wider political context of the implementation of the Roadmap, the Gaza withdrawal can create certain opportunities.

- It can create political movement that can create the requisite positive atmosphere for resuming the implementation of the Roadmap.
- It can give the PA political context for reasserting its power on the ground, and by doing so implementing its Roadmap obligations, particularly in security.
- It can help rehabilitate the two-state vision of President Bush and of Phase III of the Roadmap, if presented as a step in this direction.

- It can improve the quality of life of the Palestinian population of Gaza.

Conditions for Success

The following are not conditions for the implementation of the unilateral withdrawal – this can be done by Israel on a purely unilateral basis. These are conditions for optimizing the benefits created by such a withdrawal and minimizing the risks.

As the plan is still under development, there is a chance now to formulate it in such a way as to maximize the potential benefits. This will require decisions and actions from the Israeli government and active intervention from the international community, the Quartet, and especially the US.

- The withdrawal must be comprehensive. It must 1) include all settlements in Gaza, 2) not be replaced by a military presence, and 3) include Palestinian control over the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, with the possibility of a third party having a role.
- The withdrawal must not be seen as a tradeoff between Gaza and strengthening the occupation in the West Bank. This requires a number of steps:
 - It is part of a larger plan with a clear timeline – subject to negotiation – for ending the occupation of the West Bank.
 - Gaza settlers must not be resettled in the West Bank settlements. International aid to Israel must not be used for this purpose.
 - The West Bank and the Gaza Strip must be maintained as a single geographic and economic unit by allowing movement and economic ties to continue between them.
 - The construction of the Wall inside the West Bank must be stopped, and its course changed to the Green Line. The international position on this must not change as a result of the Gaza evacuation.
 - Until a change of the course of the Wall occurs, steps to strengthen Israeli control in areas currently beyond the course of the Wall (as contemplated in the Herzliya speech) must not be undertaken.

- The withdrawal is presented in the context of the Roadmap. Assurances and reiterations are needed to guarantee that the unilateral action is not intended to relieve Israel from its Road Map obligations or forestall permanent status negotiations.
 - A settlement freeze is the most significant Israeli obligation in Phase I and must be implemented. The plans currently floated by Israel and the US regarding a partial freeze are insufficient as they allow for construction within the settlements' master plans and allow for the construction of by-pass roads and infrastructure.

- The PA is enabled to fill the security vacuum left after the withdrawal. The PA is the only party that can legitimately assume security responsibilities over evacuated areas. To enable that, the following is needed:
 - Israeli attacks on Palestinians – whether through assassinations, incursions, arrests, or destruction of property – must be stopped.
 - Israeli attacks on the PA security forces must be stopped.
 - Security cooperation with the PA must be resumed at the policy and operational levels.
 - International help must be provided to rehabilitate the Palestinian security forces.

- The Siege on President Arafat must be ended.

- Economic measures are instated in Gaza to change the daily lives of Palestinians. Otherwise, the benefits of the withdrawal will not be felt, and sustainable support for it will not be created.

On its part, the PA will take the necessary measures to resume security control and maintenance of law and order over the evacuated areas, and will use a coordinated withdrawal to support its efforts to implement its Road Map obligations.