

A Proactive Approach to the Strategic Challenges

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Time is not working in Israel's favor. Time is working against us in a number of areas, each deserving its own lengthy discussion. I will mention them briefly: a) Iran is on its way to nuclear capability; b) the radical axis – Hezbollah, Hamas, al-Qaeda – is growing stronger; c) with each passing day, the demographic balance between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River seems to worsen from Israel's perspective, if we consider our prime interest to be a democratic Jewish nation. The bi-national option is raised anew every time we discuss the possibility that we will fail to arrive at a settlement with the Palestinians; and d) Israel's actions are delegitimized on the international arena. There is international impatience with the occupation of Judea and Samaria and construction in the Jewish West Bank settlements. With regard to each of the issues, time is not on Israel's side.

I do not accept the passive stance of the Israeli government, which seems to be waiting for a plan that will be imposed that Israel will have to implement, as was the case with the vision of two states for two peoples. It was necessary to push and prod the prime minister into the auditorium at Bar-Ilan University before he uttered those words. Had the program I propose been implemented, we would not have been there. We would not be immersed in a process of freezing Israel's strongest strategic assets in forging the eastern border; this was never part of any negotiations. It is simply that the Israeli government managed to push the Americans into a corner, leaving them no choice.

Errors of this kind will lead to a situation in which the current conflict with the Americans will only worsen and create a reality where we will be dictated to rather than act on Israeli leadership and initiative. Without an Israeli plan we are liable to have one imposed on us, one that may

not necessarily go hand-in-hand with Israel's best security and national interests. Therefore, it is of great importance that Israel present a plan of its own that is consistent with its best interests.

Negotiations with the Palestinians are critical for the region and for the possibility of reaching a peace agreement with the Syrians and the Lebanese. I think that the key lies in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict sooner rather than later. By arriving at a settlement with the Palestinians, a door is opened, the atmosphere is changed, and the possibility of reaching an agreement both with the Syrians and the Lebanese is enhanced.

The gaps between the sides on the Palestinian question are substantial. Anyone who thinks that the gaps can be straddled within a year or two should leaf through the annals of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Whoever does so soon discovers that every time we tried to summarize it all and then implement the conclusion, we hit a dead end. The only thing we managed to obtain as a result of the Oslo breakthrough is the groundwork for the steps taken in the West Bank in Areas A and B. For this our thanks go to the late Yitzhak Rabin and to Shimon Peres.

However, in practice, anyone who wanted to arrive at a settlement used an approach of "all or nothing." Today we are in the "nothing" situation. Therefore I propose using a different approach. Having examined all the other alternatives, including the possibility of another move of reorganization and transferring territory, the processes of the Roadmap to which I was a partner, the 2000 Clinton plan, the Saudi initiative, and Annapolis, I have come to the conclusion that the process must be based on first creating a reality of borders and security arrangements that provide a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I shall present one such option, which in my opinion is the right outline for Israel's future.

The central notion is to preserve Israel as a democratic Jewish state that is separate from the Palestinians, i.e., the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with security arrangements first. The borders of the Palestinian state would be determined gradually. The Palestinians would at first receive some 60 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and afterwards the scope of the territory similar in size, though not identical with the 1967 borders.

The State of Israel would receive defensible borders based on the settlement blocs, which can be listed here: Maale Adumim, Gush Etzion,

Efrat, Ariel, and the settlements in western Samaria. It think it has been a great mistake to equate the status of the settlement blocs, a national security interest of the State of Israel, with the status of the most remote hilltop outpost in Judea and Samaria. We should have stepped forward and said: we will freeze construction in there areas, while in others we won't, on the basis of a plan.

I propose that in the first stage the Palestinian state include some 60 percent of the West Bank territory, in addition to the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians would receive territorial contiguity and three times the territory now under their security and civilian responsibility. Today the Palestinians have 18.7 percent in Area A where they have security and civilian responsibility. Sixty percent of the territory would be Palestinian – P – while the rest, 40 percent, would be Israeli – I. In such a reality, it would not be necessary to evacuate any Israeli settlement or move a single military base. The settlement and security formation of Israel would not change.

In this way, 99 percent of the Palestinian population would live in Palestinian territory with territorial contiguity and freedom of movement. The legitimate, elected Palestinian government must be capable in theory and in practice of ruling in its territory as one authority in all fields: government, judiciary, and a united security force. There would have to be one law, one weapon. The condition is that the Gaza Strip would be part of the Palestinian state with the same elected leadership capable of ruling the Gaza Strip as well as the West Bank.

At this stage, the sovereignty of the State of Israel would be recognized over the settlement blocs, if necessary by Knesset legislation. Israel's eastern border would be determined as a defensible one. Then the negotiations over the core issues would begin: Jerusalem, permanent borders, and other arrangements. At this stage an evacuation-compensation law would already have been passed that would demonstrate that we intend to prepare for the relocation of some of the settlement residents, both in the settlement blocs and in the Galilee and Negev. This would be a special evacuation-compensation law, which would not only compensate for lost property but also afford the people the chance to resettle and begin their lives anew in other locations.

Before the transition to the second stage I would recommend holding a referendum on the core issues – Jerusalem and the permanent borders – that also guarantees an end to the conflict and Palestinian demands. I believe that a plebiscite of this sort, after the establishment of a Palestinian state and the designation of Israel's eastern border, would win a very large majority among the people in Israel and also open the door for political settlements and regional peace. At this stage we would include the moderate Arab world in the process. I believe there would be international recognition of the process and the Israeli position would be accorded the necessary legitimacy. In light of the Palestinians' concerns, liable to be “we will get stuck in a position of temporary borders that will one day turn out to be permanent,” I am willing to give a commitment that the territory of the Palestinian state at the end of the process would be similar in scope to the size of the territory in 1967.

International involvement is required for all the issues, especially for solving the Palestinian refugee problem, which should be done through an international apparatus as proposed by the Canadian plan. At the first stage the Canadian plan invests \$25 billion for refugees in their current locations – Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank – as a way to raise their status to that of citizens rather than refugees. Over time a plan like this can create a different reality for the refugees, perhaps even the desire to stay where they are and to continue their lives there, albeit at an entirely different level and with an infinitely better quality of life.

What are the risks of the plan? Every plan carries some risk. The first risk is the Palestinian position opposing a state that does not realize all their demands: Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, the 1967 borders, the refugees' right of return, and so on. I think that today the Palestinians understand that the demand to realize all the claims is not realistic in the foreseeable term, because processes have taken place, both on the Israeli and the Palestinian sides, which prevent the realization of such a reality. We will arrive at a different reality when we are in its midst; the temporary will become permanent.

There is a question about the lack of governmental stability on the Palestinian side and it will be raised in response to any plan or outline Israel may propose. Indeed, the reality created in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, i.e., two separate entities, is a reality that will impact on every

plan and future situation. Israel has no interest in seeing the establishment of a Palestinian state that does not include the Gaza Strip. However, I do not pose this as a preliminary condition for beginning negotiations. I believe that starting negotiations, creating defensible borders for Israel, and establishing a Palestinian state in temporary borders will create a new atmosphere and level of trust that will lead to a different reality with international support.

A legitimate question is: do we have a partner? I contend that the State of Israel must present its program and say: this is what we believe in; this is what we want to advance. The question of a partner is an internal Palestinian question, including who will be elected – the PLO or Hamas. There is also a scenario where Hamas is liable to take control of the West Bank by force as it did in the Gaza Strip.

I think that by outlining these principles we have the ability to come to Israeli citizens and say: we have a practical course. It isn't easy, and it is filled with question marks. What singles this plan out is the Israeli agreement to a Palestinian state at the first stage. This was not part of any plan that we attempted to implement. Yet at the same time, it entails defensible borders for Israel and an organized, rational process to respond to any possible development on the Palestinian side and in the regional arena.

The supreme obligation of any leadership in this generation is to bring about an end to the conflict and not leave Israel still mired in a very long conflict with the Palestinians and without a peace agreement with Syria and Lebanon. When we examine the challenges the State of Israel is facing and when we take into account the basic assumption that time is not on our side, I am convinced that we must make the utmost effort to outline a way, to lead and to initiate, rather than be dragged regularly in a different direction or sit and wait.