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## **When the Roadmap is a One Way Street** *Israel's Strategy for Permanent Occupation*

By JEFF HALPER

One may well think that the struggle inside the Jewish community of Israel is between those of the political right, who want to maintain the settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank so as to "redeem" the Greater Land of Israel as a Jewish country, and those of the left who seek a two-state solution with the Palestinians and are thus willing to relinquish enough of the "territories", if not all, in order that a viable Palestinian state may emerge.

This is not really the case. Polls and the make-up of the Israeli government suggest that perhaps a quarter of Israeli Jews fall into the first group, the die-hards, while not more than 10 per cent support a full withdrawal from the occupied territories. (Virtually no Israeli Jews use the term "occupation," which Israel denies it has.) The vast majority of Israeli Jews, stretching from the liberal Meretz party through Labour, Kadima and into the "liberal" wing of the Likud, excepting only the religious parties and the extreme right-wing led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the current minister of strategic affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, share a broad consensus: for both security reasons and because of Israel's "facts on the ground", the Arabs (as we [Israelis] call the Palestinians) will have to settle for a truncated mini- state on no more than 15-20 per cent of the country between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River.

What's more, it's agreed that the decision whether to relinquish any territory and how much is an exclusively Israeli decision. We may proffer to the Palestinians some kind of a "generous offer" if they behave themselves and it suits our purpose, but any initiative in the direction of "peace" must be unilateral. The Palestinians may indicate a preference, but the decision is ours and ours alone. Our power, our all-encompassing concern for security and the plain fact that the Arabs just don't count (except as a nuisance factor) limit any peace process to, at best, a willingness to grant them a tiny Bantustan on four or five cantons, all encircled by Israeli settlements and the military. Israeli control of the entire Land of Israel, whether for religious, national or security reasons, is a given, never to be compromised.

This is, of course, completely unacceptable to the Palestinians. That by itself doesn't matter, but it does raise a fundamental problem. In any genuine negotiations leading to just, sustainable and mutually agreed-upon agreement, Israel would have to give up much more than it is willing to do. Negotiations must take place once in a while, if only to project an image of Israel as a country seeking peace--Annapolis being merely the latest charade--but they can never lead to any real breakthrough because two- thirds of the Jewish public support a permanent Israeli presence in the occupied territories, civilian and military, that forecloses a viable Palestinian state. How, then, does Israel retain its major settlements, a "greater" Jerusalem and control over territory and borders without appearing intransigent? How can it maintain its image as the only seeker of peace and the victim of Arab terrorism, effectively concealing its own violence and, indeed, the very fact of occupation in order to shift the blame to the Palestinians?

The answer for the past 40 years of occupation is the status quo, delay, while quietly expanding the settlements and strengthening its grip on Judea and Samaria (again, we do not use the terms "occupation" or "occupied territories" in Israel, not to mention "Palestinian"). Just look at the run-up to Annapolis and the negotiations Israel is promising. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said recently that "Annapolis is a landmark on the path to negotiations and of the genuine effort to achieve the realization of the vision of two nations: the State of Israel--the nation of the Jewish

people; and the Palestinian state--the nation of the Palestinian people". Sounds good, doesn't it? Now look at the pre-conditions Israel has imposed just in the two weeks before Annapolis:

Redefining Phase 1 of the Road Map. The first phase of the Road Map, the very basis of negotiations, calls for Israel to freeze its settlement construction. That is something Israel will obviously not do. So, on the basis of a letter former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon received from President Bush in 2004--a fundamental change in American policy that nevertheless does not commit the other members of the Road Map "Quartet", Europe, Russia and the UN--Israel announced that it defines the areas considered "occupied" by the Quartet as only those areas falling outside its major settlement blocs and "greater" Jerusalem. Thus, unilaterally, Israel (and the US apparently) reduced the territory to be negotiated with the Palestinians from 22 per cent to a mere 15 per cent, and that truncated into fragmented cantons.

Requiring recognition of Israel as a "Jewish state." The Palestinians are required to formally recognize the state of Israel. They did so already in 1988 when they accepted the two-state solution, at the outset of the Oslo process and repeatedly over the past two decades. Now comes a fresh demand: that before any negotiations they recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Not only does that introduce an entirely new element that Israel knows the Palestinians will not accept, but it prejudices the equal status of Palestinian citizens of Israel, a full 20 per cent of the Israeli population. This leads the way to transfer, to ethnic cleansing. Tzipi Livni, Israel's foreign minister, recently told a press conference that the future of Israel's Arab citizens is in a future Palestinian state, not in Israel itself.

Creating insurmountable political obstacles. Two weeks before Annapolis was to convene, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, passed a law that a majority of two-thirds would be required to approve any change in the status of Jerusalem, an impossible threshold.

Delayed implementation. OK, the Israeli government says, we'll negotiate. But the implementation of any agreement will wait on the complete cessation of any resistance on the part of the Palestinians. Given the fact that Israel views any resistance, armed or non-violent, as a form of terrorism, this erects yet another insurmountable obstacle before any peace process.

Declaring a "transitional" Palestinian state. If all else fails--actually negotiating with the Palestinians or relinquishing the occupation not being an option--the US, at Israel's behest, can manage to skip Phase 1 of the Road Map and go directly to Phase 2, which calls for a "transitional" Palestinian state before, in Phase 3, its actual borders, territory and sovereignty are agreed upon. This is the Palestinians' nightmare: being locked indefinitely in the limbo of a "transitional" state. For Israel it is ideal, since it offers the possibility of imposing borders and expanding into the Palestinian areas unilaterally yet, since its fait accompli is only "transitional," seeming to conform to the Road Map's requirement to decide the final issues through negotiations.

The end result, towards which Israel has been progressing deliberately and systematically since 1967, can only be called apartheid, which means "separation" in Afrikaner, precisely the term Israel uses to describe its policy (hafrada in Hebrew). And it is apartheid in the strict sense of the term: one population separating itself from the rest, then dominating them permanently and institutionally through a political regime like an expanded Israel locking the Palestinians into dependent and impoverished cantons. The overriding question for the Israeli government, then, is not how to reach peace. If peace and security were truly the issue, Israel could have had that 20 years ago if it would have conceded the 22 per cent of the country required for a viable Palestinian state. Today, when Israel's control is infinitely stronger, why, ask the Israeli Jewish public and the government it elects, should we concede anything significant? We enjoy peace with Egypt and Jordan, and Syria is dying to negotiate. We have relations with most Arab and Muslim states. We enjoy the absolute and uncritical support of the world's only superpower,

supported by a compliant Europe. Terrorism is under control, the conflict has been made manageable, Israel's economy is booming. What, ask Israelis, is wrong with this picture?

No, the issue for Israel is rather how to transform its Occupation from what the world considers a temporary situation to a permanent political fact accepted by the international community, de facto if need be or, if apartheid can be finessed in the form of a two-state solution, then formally. And here's the dilemma, and the source of debate within the Israeli government: does Israel continue with the strategy that has served it so well these past 40 years, delaying or prolonging negotiations so as to maintain the status quo, all the while strengthening its hold over the Palestinian territories or, at this unique but fleeting moment in history when George Bush is still in office, does it try to nail it all down, forcing upon the Palestinians a transitional state within the framework of the Road Map?

Olmert, following Sharon, is pushing for the former. Netanyahu, Lieberman, the right-wing (including many in Olmert's own party) and, significantly, Labour Chairman and Defence Minister Ehud Barak, always a military hawk, are resisting out of fear that even a process of pretend negotiations might get out of hand, creating expectations on Israel. Better, they say, to stay with the tried-and-true policy of status quo which can, if cleverly managed, extend indefinitely. Besides, Bush is a lame duck, and no pressure will be put on Israel until June 2009, at least six months after the next American president is inaugurated, Democrat or Republican. We're just fine until then; why rock the boat? The only tricky time for Israel is the two years in the midst of a presidential term. We can weather that. Annapolis? We'll try cautiously for apartheid, hoping that Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas], prodded by Quartet envoy Tony Blair, will play the role of collaborator. If that doesn't work, well, status quo is always a reliable default.

In the meantime, as long as the Israeli public enjoys peace-and-quiet and a good economy, and as long as it remains convinced that security requires Israel to retain control of the territories, no pressure will come from the home front for any meaningful change of policy. Given this political landscape in Israel, in the territories and abroad, it's hard for Israeli leaders to conceal their ebullient feeling that, whether formally or not, "we've won".

*Jeff Halper is the Coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN) and a candidate, with the Palestinian peace activist Ghassan Andoni, for the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. He can be reached at [jeff@icahd.org](mailto:jeff@icahd.org).*

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