**The Pitfalls of Unitlateralism**

**By Marcia Freedman**

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There seems to be a growing acceptance that a unilateral end to the occupation through continued Israeli evacuations of the West Bank, though maybe not the preferred way, is nonetheless an acceptable way for Israel to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians.

It may be true that any end to as much of the occupation as possible is better than what we have now: no end in sight. But if so, the price is very high. There are predictable pitfalls to continued unilateral moves on Israel's part, accompanied by the tacit or explicit consent of the international community and with or without the concurrence of the Palestinian Authority.

If Israel alone determines the border between itself and the Palestinian entity, one has to assume that the long-term intention is to turn the "security barrier" into Israel's de facto final border. To assume that Israel is investing $2 million per kilometer to build anything but a permanent dividing line defies common sense.

If the planned route of the security barrier becomes the border, Israel will annex 8-10% of the West Bank, effectively cutting the Palestinian entity into four enclaves with freedom of movement between them largely dependent on Israeli politics and the military command. The hazards to Israel of such a course of action may not be immediately apparent, but in the long term it spells a very bleak future.   The planned route of the fence will seal off the West Bank from East Jerusalem, isolating the Palestinian East Jerusalemites from all but Israeli-controlled access to the West Bank. It also extends 15 miles into the West Bank to incorporate Ariel, effectively cutting the West Bank into a northern and southern enclave, with travel between them restricted to a narrow passage easily controlled by Israel.

The overall effect of these consequences will be to divide the Palestinian entity into four enclaves: the Gaza Strip, which will have Israeli-controllable land access through Egypt, and marine and air access only by Israeli sufferance; East Jerusalem, whose residents will either remain stateless or become Israeli citizens; the Northern West Bank; and the Southern West Bank.

If Israel's intention is to create what some see as optimal borders for itself under existing circumstances, without regard to the effect of its actions on the Palestinians and Palestinian statehood, then the unilateral approach is just the ticket.

But the consequences of not securing a negotiated agreement prior to any further evacuation portend an infelicitous future for the Jewish state.

The Palestinian entity will languish on Israel's borders neither a viable state nor an occupied territory. While it will likely continue to have a government, in all critical respects it will remain subject to Israeli military and political control. The Palestinian people will of necessity be left impoverished, in civil chaos, and largely, still, a client of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). Oppression weakens resistance in many, but for another many it steels it. With each new generation, Israel will be cultivating, by not-so-benign neglect, a dangerous enemy along its border.

By following a policy of unilateralism, Israel will be in danger of becoming a modern-day Sparta -- dependent in perpetuity on maintaining an overwhelming military advantage, with citizenry of all the generations compelled to serve in a trained army ever on guard, plagued by terrorism, its army and security forces attempting to control the Palestinians from a distance. Even Sparta can only win so many wars.

For now, this is only one possible future, but it is a likely one if Israel chooses to determine its borders unilaterally and, in so doing, creates impossible borders for a "provisional" Palestinian state. Furthermore, determining these borders outside the framework of negotiations, will mean that Israel's borders will likely never be recognized as legitimate by the international community.

It is an unchallenged truth that there is only one superpower in the world, and that superpower is the United States. Fortunately, our government has given some indication that it understands that a just, negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict under the aegis of US diplomacy would benefit Israel, the Palestinians, and the security of the United States and the rest of the world.

With both Israeli and Palestinian elections scheduled to take place, the year 2006 will be a crucial one for Israel and the future of its relationship to the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world. And this is where we American Jews come in. Our work is to mobilize the American Jewish community to press our government to intervene definitively, vigorously urging the return of both parties to substantive negotiations in order to prevent the grim scenario that unilateralism portends.

Though we cannot expect, in an election year here and in Israel, that there will be any bold new diplomatic moves, history suggests that the Israeli government will seek to create new facts on the ground, either through new construction and other unilateral moves that prejudice final status negotiations. The Palestinians, for their part, will likely continue to drag their feet in putting an end to terrorism and disarming militants.

Those who seek peace and security for Israel will need to keep a critical eye on the actions of all parties, but particularly on our own government. Is it doing enough to prevent unilateralism from determining the future? What is it doing to keep both parties on track toward a resumption of negotiations? Is it really supporting the moderate Palestinian leadership enabling them to stay in power with a strong mandate? Is it holding Israel's feet to the fire in fulfilling its initial commitment under the Road Map?

In short, we must, at every opportunity, support stated U.S. policy, which envisions a negotiated solution to the conflict that ends with the establishment of a viable Palestinian state and a secure Israel.

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