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"Separate Palestinians, Israelis through a Trusteeship"

By Kenneth W. Stein

While Washington's eye is focused on Iraq, the opportunity should not be lost to push Israelis and Palestinians where they need to go: out of each other's lives. Establish a trusteeship mechanism that oversees the separation of the populations and is the transitional device that establishes a Palestinian state in three years.

No good reasons exist for waiting until after the Iraqi picture is developed. Moving Israelis and Palestinians away from violence is not dependent upon whether Saddam Hussein survives another Bush presidency.

Between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, reality has locked Palestinians and Israelis in a tight demographic clasp. Israel's Jewish population is not emigrating; the Palestinian Arab population is neither wanted in Israel nor is it going elsewhere in the Middle East. Short of massive intermarriage, the destruction of one of the communities or the virtual impossibility of either community living peaceably as a minority under the other's control, the only remaining solution is to separate the populations and partition the land.

Leaving Palestinians and Israelis to their own devices remains an open-ended prescription for bloodshed. In the 54 years of the Arab-Israeli conflict, wars relieved Israel of grave threats, but none ended aspects of the conflict except when an active external mediator generated disengagement agreements (Henry Kissinger) or a treaty (Jimmy Carter). Even the Jordanian-Israeli treaty emerged after American (George H.W. Bush-James Baker) stewardship in the early 1990s. The moment is again ripe for external intervention. Population disengagement will not happen unless it is externally driven and carefully applied.

Separation -- a Palestinian state creation through a period of trusteeship -- is more than Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy, but less than the comprehensive negotiated peace once sought by the Carter administration. A trusteeship can be created which is neither intrusive nor tutorial for the Palestinian people, and can have enormously positive security outcomes for Israelis individually and nationally.

The process of population separation under a trusteeship has many virtues. A trusteeship mechanism can be the transitional phase that transcends a collapsing Palestinian Authority and/or Yasser Arafat's demise and aims to create a Palestinian state within three years. The Palestinian state's creation must be tied to an elimination of Palestinian violence against Israelis; that result should be directly tied to Israel's non-use of lethal force.

As a framework, the trusteeship must stimulate the establishment of Palestinian judicial, legislative, executive and financial institutions that better the lives of their people immediately. It must carefully protect, empower and enlarge the small number of reformers now emerging in the Palestinian community. A prerequisite for the trusteeship to end on time with a state's emergence -- say by 2005 -- must include the Palestinian public's unequivocal disassociation with violence and include overt public punishment applied by Palestinians for Palestinians who engage in violence.

For a trusteeship to commence, it must be negotiated at a meeting or in pre-negotiations by Israelis and Palestinians; it must have the real support of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States. Nations and international lending institutions must be prepared to allocate \$1.5 billion a year for 10 years to the Palestinian state. The trusteeship must be managed with demonstrable Palestinian transparency that rewards accountability, ensures infrastructure development and makes a difference to an average Palestinian.

During the first three months of the trusteeship, Israel will be obliged, after a similar period of calm, to disengage itself from large portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, allowing the creation of Palestinian geographic contiguity. Israel must halt all settlement activity, while Palestinians establish the security apparatus necessary to enforce law and order. Within a year of the trusteeship's creation, Palestinian municipal and national elections must be held to establish popular support for the political leadership.

The greatest foe to a separation and partition through trusteeship is temerity. The only beneficiaries of continuing incrementalism are the radicals on both sides. If separation through trusteeship fails, very little is lost. Remaining options include continued terrorism, military reply, death, destruction, economic destitution and creeping settlement expansion.

In a multilateral manner, with forceful American leadership, in a specific timeframe, and with coalition partners, it can be done. A trusteeship process takes the power from the hands and minds of both

Israeli and Palestinian radicals. Trusteeship can be a phase and means to establish a formal Palestinian-Israeli non-belligerency arrangement, or perhaps something more, guaranteed by the international community.

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