

Dr. Khalil Shikaki:

“The Palestinian Responses to the "Road Map" to Peace”

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My talk today is about Palestinian responses to the road map to peace. The road map has been tabled for almost a year now and has gone nowhere. My talk will focus on why this is the case and what the Palestinian perception of the road map has been.

The situation in the Middle East between Palestinians and Israelis is very complicated. It is both bad and good. There are dynamics in Palestinian/Israeli relations that have, despite the violence, been going in the right direction. In my work as a public opinion pollster among Palestinians and Israelis, I have seen positive trends in both societies.

The road map to peace was comprised of four essential components.

It called for new Palestinian leadership and suggested creating a Palestinian Prime Minister. The road map was presented within the framework of regime change, a notion that became popular in Washington last year.

The second component is the Palestinian need to have a perception of the end game. We had the U.S. President Bush's vision of a two state solution, so the road map stays a little bit above that.

Third, the road map had something immediate. It called for relief for Palestinians and Israelis in the form of a new interim arrangement to create a Palestinian State with provisional borders.

With a long range vision, a change of Palestinian leadership, and the creation of a provisional state, the result would be the fourth component, an end to violence and the return of Palestinians and Israelis to negotiations.

Something went wrong in all four components of the road map. This is not to say that the road map has been a complete failure and that everything in the

road map has been wrong. Something larger was wrong, and by examining that we can create a context for the road map.

The Oslo Process started about 11 years ago. Israelis and Palestinians reached a bargain, a grand bargain that involved three essential components.

Both sides recognized each other. Israel recognized the PLO for the first time as the legitimate spokesman for the Palestinians. Similarly, the Palestinians recognized the State of Israel, not only diplomatically, but concretely by entering into negotiations.

The second component of the Oslo Process was that it was open ended. This is something that was originally more important to the Israelis than to the Palestinians. In fact, the Palestinians had to be pressured to accept it.

Particularly under the Barak Government in 1999, six years after signing Oslo, the Israelis had gradually begun to realize that this open-endedness was not good. By the time the Bush administration presented the road map, the Israelis complained that the road map did not have sufficient foresight to address, for example, how the refugee issue would be resolved. So, even the Sharon administration criticized this open-endedness. This being said, it was nevertheless essential in the early bargaining.

Perhaps to some, the third component is what the whole Oslo Process was about: an end to Israeli occupation in return for an end to Palestinian violence. It was not exactly articulated as such, but this is essentially how the Israeli public and the Palestinian public understood the grand bargain of the Oslo Process.

Once the Oslo Process was implemented and the Palestinian Authority was created, the Palestinians defined their national interests in the following way: The open-endedness of the process was a core problem. An open-ended process meant that the Palestinians and Israelis entered a peace agreement that did not deliver solutions to all their problems. In fact, no major issue was solved by Oslo. Issues of Jerusalem, refugees, permanent borders, and Jewish settlements were not resolved. The Oslo Process was simply about mutual recognition, a promise to end occupation in return for an end to violence, a gradual transfer of land and jurisdiction to a Palestinian Authority that would be established in the West Bank

and Gaza. There was no solution to all the problems that has plagued the Middle East for a very long time.

Palestinians, up until that point, had insisted that any agreement with Israel must have answers to all the problems. Israelis and Palestinians negotiating in Oslo discovered, however, that the gap in positions with regard to all these issues was so wide that they believed it made sense for them to postpone the solutions to long-term problems. They hoped that an implementation of a peace agreement would create conditions that would be conducive to a successful outcome of permanent status negotiations. So Palestinians entered this phase of the Oslo Process very, very worried about the open-endedness of the process. They feared that Israel would eventually tell them that there would be no solution to the refugee problem, that Jerusalem would remain united as the capital of the State of Israel, that the borders of the Palestinian State would be perhaps 50% rather than 100% of the West Bank.

Palestinians were very concerned about all the issues of permanent status. They had always insisted that these issues be resolved for them to give up violence against Israelis. Once agreeing to give up violence, they were concerned about the open-endedness of the process. Consequently, they formulated their national interests in the following manner:

First, it was very important to transform the PLO and the subsequent Palestinian Authority into a state very quickly. Although they did not do a very good job in creating a state, that was one of Palestinian's top priorities.

The second was to improve relations with the United States. The PLO, has been labeled a terrorist organization by the United States, but the Palestinians hoped to change this. They wanted improve relations not only to change the image of the PLO and the Palestinians, but also for economic assistance. This was also true of Europe, but the focus was more on the United States. Importantly, Palestinians also wanted to win American understanding for the Palestinian position with regard to permanent status. The Palestinians hoped that when negotiations started with Israel, that the United States would stand by positions similar to the Palestinian positions, thereby forcing Israel to come to the negotiating table rather than leaving things in limbo.

At this point, the third component of Palestinian National Interest was also to improve relations with Israel that is to win a pro-peace constituency in Israel. Even if an Israeli Government did not want to move forward, there would be public pressure, there will be a peace camp in Israel that would continuously press for peace, for an end to the conflict, and for a permanent settlement with the Palestinians.

These Palestinian objectives failed. The state has been devastated and an effective government never materialized. Palestinian confidence in the legitimacy of their own political system has been deteriorating over time, and particularly during the Intifada. Our relationship with the United States has deteriorated as never before, particularly over the last three years under the Bush Administration. Finally, the peace camp in Israel did indeed materialize for a while, but vanished very quickly until there is almost no peace camp today.

So, what went wrong with Oslo? Again, I focus on this from a Palestinian perspective. The essential problem was the open-ended nature of the process. Palestinians believed that the open-endedness meant that if these issues were not resolved, both Palestinians and Israelis would use the interim period of the Oslo Process to strengthen their negotiating positions with regard to final status issues. In order to do that, you would always want to keep your options open because you would ask yourselves, what if permanent status negotiations failed? The Israelis assumed that if negotiations failed, then they would continue to colonize the West Bank, building more Jewish settlements, and therefore their objective would be keeping control as much of the West Bank as possible. On the Palestinian side, the Palestinians believed that they needed to keep the option of going back to violence alive. They could not irreversibly give up the option to resort to violence because they asked themselves what would happen if Israel would not end the occupation?

So, while the interim arrangement was supposed to create good will, it did the exact opposite. During the Oslo process Israel doubled the number of settlers in the West Bank. In 1993, 98,000 settlers lived in the West Bank aside from Jerusalem and today there are almost 220,000. Israel created facts on the ground

hoping to improve its negotiating position. The open-endedness turned out to be a major disaster for both Israelis and Palestinians.

There were many other problems with Oslo that I will not go into. I think it was clear from the beginning that the focus that emerged immediately after signing Oslo, namely the focus of security at the expense of good government, democracy, economic progress, was a big mistake. Both the U.S. and Israel then believed that democracy was not good for security, that Palestinians would be able to deliver security more efficiently if they had no democracy. When Clinton's Vice President Al Gore visited Jericho in 1994, he came to congratulate the Palestinians. For what? For establishing military courts. For Palestinians, military courts meant the end of the rule of law. There would be no independent judiciary the minute military courts were established. The Palestinian judiciary has indeed been completely devastated during the last few years, in part because security courts were established to deliver security to the Israelis. Rabin was asked why he was creating a Palestinian Authority by bringing in the PLO and Arafat, rather than allowing local leadership in the West Bank and Gaza to emerge. He answered that Arafat and the PLO were more authoritarian and that would be good for Israel because they could deliver security without concern for human rights organizations. He was referring to B'Tselem, an Israeli organization comparing his own situation to Arafat's. Arafat would not have to worry about a B'Tselem in the Palestinian areas; he would not have to worry about a high court. Palestinians would rule themselves with no regard to human rights, with no regard to the rule of law. The assumption was that security could only be delivered at the expense of democracy and good government. I believe everybody today recognizes that this was a mistake, but it was not even questioned during the Oslo Process.

When Palestinians and Israelis met at Camp David in July 2000, negotiations failed. This was the first time that the two parties, with the help of the American President, met at a summit level to try and find a permanent agreement. In fact, some of the issues that Arafat, Barak and Clinton were discussing, such as Jerusalem, had not been dealt with by negotiators before.

Palestinians did not want to go to Camp David. Not because they did not want peace quickly, but because the Palestinians believed that opening these topics for discussion would mean taking a great deal of risk. It could create high expectations, only to discover that the positions are totally incompatible. The Israelis insisted on Camp David and the Clinton Administration agreed to host the summit.

We failed to reach an agreement. Before going to Camp David, Arafat asked for and received a promise from the U.S. President that if the Camp David negotiations failed to create permanent status, the Palestinians would not be blamed. The minute Camp David failed, however, there was finger pointing and the Palestinians were singled out as the reason for the failure. The story developed that Israelis made a very generous offer and the Palestinians rejected it. I have argued that this was in fact not the case. Palestinians, while admitting that the Israelis made an offer, saw it as partial and a sign of progress. However, the offer did not meet minimum Palestinian demands, whether it concerned territorial issues, holy places in Jerusalem, or refugees and the question of the right of return.

Failing to reach a permanent status agreement at Camp David the parties continued negotiations until January 2001 in the last phase of negotiations at Taba in Egypt. The final communiqué of that forum indicated that significant progress was made on all issues. None of the issues were finalized, however. Negotiators declared that they needed more time and that they would come back to the table after Israel's elections. This was the last word we have heard from Israelis and Palestinians with regard to permanent status. Since then, there has been absolutely no official negotiations between the two parties.

There are two schools of thoughts on the implications of the failure of Palestinians and Israelis to reach a permanent settlement. One which has been advocated by many Israelis and by the Right Wing in particular, is that there is a fundamental clash of interests that no negotiations will ever be able to successfully bridge. Barak himself, who negotiated at Camp David, has advocated

a philosophy partially along those lines. I personally do not for a second believe this to be the case.

Since 1992, though not acting in an official capacity, I have Participated in second track discussions between Israelis and Palestinians. My own conclusion, holding partially to a second school of thought, is that the failure to reach a comprehensive permanent status agreement between Palestinians and Israelis was temporary, that the process itself was moving in a positive direction, and that the substantive official negotiations only took place between May 2000 and January 2001. Only nine months of negotiations and the first two months were held in secret. For two months in Stockholm, Shlomo Ben Ami met with the current Palestinian Prime Minister, Abu Ala', when he was a speaker in the Palestinian Parliament. For two months they secretly negotiated a permanent status deal and were able to make progress on some of the issues. Some of issues were not opened. Barak would not allow Jerusalem, for example, to be discussed. There was nevertheless progress on territorial issues as well as on the refugee issue. Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat declared to the world that Camp David talks addressed 80% of the differences. From a Palestinian perspective this indicates that we saw progress from Stockholm to Camp David, yet no closure.

If you conclude that there is a fundamental clash of interests, then peace through negotiations is not possible. If, on the other hand, you believe negotiations were in fact moving in a positive direction, then you certainly want to resume negotiations as quickly as possible. The question remains, should we negotiate under violence.

The Palestinian Intifada started in September 2000 after the current Israeli Prime Minister Sharon went up to Al-Haram al-Sharif, as the Palestinians call it or the Temple Mount as the Israelis call it and after excessive Israeli use of force led to the death of 10 Palestinians every single day, for almost 10 days, immediately following that visit. Thereafter, the Intifada was sustained by a determined Palestinian view that sought to emulate Hizballah and its actions in South Lebanon. Negotiations have failed and through the Intifada people found an alternative to negotiations. This was not the official view of the Palestinian Authority. This was the view of Young Guard Nationalists as well as Islamists

who were in any case opposed to negotiations and to the compromises that were being discussed.

The violence that started in September continues. This violence has affected Palestinians in four ways. It deepened the serious crisis of legitimacy of the Palestinian political system. The Young Guard Nationalists were not only revolting against the Israeli occupation, they were also revolting against the Palestinian Old Guard's inability to deliver good governance.

The second consequence of the Intifada has been a change in the domestic balance of power. Mainstream Nationalists, the moderate forces that signed the Oslo Agreement and were willing to enter into negotiations with Israel, held public support while there was progress in the peace process. These forces began to lose ground, however, very quickly during the Intifada. In the "golden era" of the peace process they enjoyed almost 55% support from the public. Today, they hardly have 25%. The Islamists who had the support of just 15% of the public right after the failure of Camp David, today have the support of almost 35% of the Palestinian public. This is a major change. Arafat, who used to have support of 75% of the Palestinians in 1996, has hardly 35%. The Palestinian Authority is losing public support while the Islamists are gaining support and legitimacy.

Thirdly, the young guard came to believe that the existing leadership was corrupt, inept, inefficient, and a clique. Rather than having the interest of the Palestinian people to heart, they were seen as profiteers from the peace process. The young guard came to believe it is time for a change in leadership.

The fourth consequence of the Intifada has been a change in perception on the role of violence at the public level. In 1996, several suicide attacks took place against Israelis in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. These attacks came right before the Israeli elections in which Prime Minister Netanyahu was elected. At that time, surveys indicated that only 20% of the Palestinian public supported those attacks. 80% of the Palestinian public believed in and supported negotiations. For this reason, the Palestinian Authority, under Arafat's leadership, was able to crack down on Hamas and Islamic Jihad, arresting almost 5,000 of their men. The two parties were devastated by the Palestinian Authority's actions. This is completely different from the context we see today. Today that the Palestinian Authority has

no legitimacy. The public believes that negotiations have failed and that violence pays. This sentiment is based on what Hizballah did in Lebanon. Palestinians believe that Israel, which occupied parts of Lebanon for a long time, was forced to unilaterally withdraw under fire because of Hizballah's violence. Palestinian's asked themselves, "If Hizballah can do it, why not us?" As a result, the Palestinian public begins to shift its opinion on the primacy of force and the need to use violence.

The Israeli response to this Intifada has made things much worse for The Palestinians. Israel not only responded to violence in kind, in fact it was Israel's own violence that started the uprising. I described earlier Israel's excessive use of force which led to the death of 10 Palestinians every day for 10 days. Furthermore Israel resorted to collective punishment, putting all Palestinians under siege through internal closures and curfews. This collective punishment policy radicalized normal people whom the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian National Movement relied on as the backbone of support for the peace process. People who had absolutely nothing to do with the violence or the Intifada were suddenly being punished by the actions of the Israelis. This radicalized the public.

Instead of targeting those who were actually committing the violence, the Israelis started to target the Palestinian Authority and its security establishment. Today, there is almost no single installation of the Palestinian Security Services that has not been destroyed by the Israelis. The road map calls on the Palestinians to enforce a cease fire yet ignores the fact that the Palestinians do not have the capacity to do that anymore because of Israeli actions of the last three years.

Thirdly, the Israelis have said they will not negotiate under fire. Taba ended with a promise to return to negotiations, a promise made during violence. Yes, there was a new Israeli Government, but the fact that negotiations were frozen at that moment means that a solution will only come if one party admitted defeat. If neither side wins militarily, then the conflict can rage on forever.

If, as Israel says, there will be no negotiating a way out of this mess, then how are we going to get out of it? The final Israeli response was to begin to

consider separation from those Palestinians. The road map was presented under these conditions.

There were inherent problems in the four components of the road map to peace as outlined above. Palestinians needed an empowered Prime Minister and this called for political reforms. The road map assumption was that Arafat needed to be marginalized completely, and both Israel and the U.S. had already refused to talk with him. Yet, he is the most popular Palestinian leader. He is the elected leader. Despite having lost tremendous power and support over the years, he maintains 35% support. He is immensely more popular than Abu Mazen the prime minister that Israel and the United States embraced early last year. In my survey work, Abu Mazen's had only a 3% popularity rating over the last 10 years.

How do you empower a Prime Minister who does not have a power base? The assumption in the U.S. and Israeli administrations has been that Arafat needs to empower the Prime Minister. But if Arafat is "evil," why would he cooperate in his own marginalization? Palestinians believe that if a Prime Minister is to be empowered, he must be empowered by the Palestinian people themselves. If Arafat fails to deliver what the Palestinians want, and if a Prime Minister succeeds, that's an empowerment. You can help the Prime Minister succeed only by making him succeed in delivering to the Palestinian public what it wants. The public wants an end to collective punishment, an end to closures, the release of prisoners, the right to go back to work, and end to the internal siege, beginning to dismantle the settlements and outposts that have been created all over the West Bank. Show the people that as Prime Minister you can deliver what Arafat could not, making the public the source of empowerment. Both Israel and the United States refused to pay the price, and in so doing, they essentially left Abu Mazen naked and useless. The only thing that came out of the embrace from Israel and the United States was that Abu Mazen was called a traitor and a puppet.

The second problem was with the lack of long-term vision. Almost 3/4 of both Palestinians and Israelis supported reconciliation based on a two state solution, but it's not sufficient. We need to tell the people how other issues are going to be resolved. Both Israelis and Palestinians want to know how the refugee

issue will be dealt with in permanent status, how Jerusalem will be divided or not divided, how the final borders will be delineated. The US administration did not want to get into that. Failing that, they created an environment in which neither Palestinians nor Israelis were willing to make immediate concessions because they were worried about what would happen later. The road map failed to deliver a clear vision of the permanent status.

This is why Palestinians disliked the idea of a state with provisional borders. They do not support it because they believe that as long as permanent status issues remain unresolved, that the provisional borders will become permanent. This is particularly important to Palestinians because Israel is today building a wall deep inside the West Bank. With this wall, concrete in some places, eight meters high in some places, Israelis are sending a message to the Palestinians: "These are the borders." Israeli intent is irrelevant. Palestinians believe that Israel is unilaterally creating the permanent borders of their state on a de facto basis. In an environment like this, Palestinians will not accept a state with provisional borders because they are afraid that this will become the final state.

Finally, the question of security. How do you provide security when you have destroyed the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to deliver that security. The road map, if fact, had an answer. It said that the United States would provide training to rebuild the Palestinian Security Services. That was a year ago. This is the U.S.'s most important commitment in the road map. 45,000 Palestinians are part of the Security Services. The number of people that have been trained by the U.S. as part of this rebuilding process up until now is a dozen. Only a dozen people. Israel argued against rebuilding the Security Services as long as they remained under Arafat's control. Yet Israel says the Palestinians must deliver security. Palestinians can not deliver security because they do not have the capacity to provide it.

We are in a (US) election year. By all counts, Palestinians and Israelis believe the U.S. is withdrawing, and that the road map which had a life span of one year is expiring. The administration's own attention is no longer focused here. It is focused on the elections and, therefore, the road map is over. The lack

of U.S. leadership means domestic dynamics will be at play. By the time the U.S. administration returns to the region, the situation will be greatly different from the situation today. The violence will continue as the Palestinians respond to the Israeli wall, and Hamas will probably continue to be strengthened over the next year as Israel takes unilateral actions.

Today Prime Minister Sharon told the Israeli paper Haaretz that he has given orders to begin planning for the evacuation of 17 of the Gaza settlements. He intends to pull out of Gaza whether through negotiations or through unilateral steps. While Palestinians would certainly welcome any end to occupation, Israel's doing so unilaterally will create a great deal of suspicion within the Palestinian Authority and within the Palestinian peace camp. It will look like a repeat of what happened in South Lebanon. Would the West Bank be next? If so, there is no need for negotiations. Why don't we all turn to violence? The Palestinian Authority's paralysis will continue and might in fact be deepened by Israel's unilateral steps. Hamas is much stronger than Fatah in the Gaza Strip. Fatah is the mainstream Nationalists Force. Hamas, if it decides to do so, can very easily take over Gaza and turn it into a state of its own when the Israelis pull out. This could very well lead to the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, currently kept together artificially through funding from Europe and Saudi Arabia. If this funding is no longer forthcoming, the Palestinian Authority will probably collapse very quickly.

The only way the road map could be revived and some of the consequences of these dynamics mitigated is to for the United States to take the lead again, but this time to do it right. One way of doing it right is to help empower a Prime Minister rather than to sit, wait and see what he can do. Endorse principles of permanent status along the lines of the Geneva Initiative. Helping to build regional consensus around those principles would also go a long way in making it easier for Palestinians and Israelis to have peace of mind about their future. Most importantly, the U.S. can bring the Sharon Government to bilateral negotiations instead of unilateral actions.

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