

A Road to Ruin: Implications of a Palestinian Corridor Across Central Israel

Justus Reid Weiner*

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert is flying to the United States this Saturday night. After meeting with President Bush he will return next week to Israel in time to meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on June 25. Olmert is expected to come under pressure to accept the proposals of U.S. Security Coordinator General Keith Dayton (also called the “benchmarks”), one of which is to allow convoys of trucks to connect the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This, the administration postulates, is a necessary first step to ultimately establish so-called “safe passage,” which is viewed as an integral element of a future “viable Palestinian state.”

Olmert’s and Rice’s visits should be seen as the latest effort to cajole Israel into accepting a Palestinian road across its midsection as its down payment on a list of non-reciprocal concessions. For more than ten years, such initiatives have been undertaken to foist different versions of ‘connectivity,’ ‘contiguity’ and ‘continuity’ on successive Israeli governments. This misguided venture has never been subject to careful analysis. Amazingly, this idea has taken root, just as the Gaza Strip has been descending into total chaos.

At this stage the U.S. is speaking of truck convoys. This concept is one of the surviving legacies of the Oslo years despite the fact that there is no requirement resembling this in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 and that it was only suggested as a form of so-called ‘safe passage’ in the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement, one of the eight failed Oslo era efforts,

It is vital to bear history in mind. For nearly two decades, from the end of the Israel’s War of Independence in 1949 to the Six-Day War in 1967, there was no physical connection whatsoever between Gaza and the West Bank. The former was under Egyptian military rule and the latter had been annexed illegally to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Thus, calls for contiguity and safe passage are even beyond the maximalist Palestinian demand that a Palestinian State be established along the pre-1967 armistice lines.

Besides the issue of legal rights, there are practical risks as well. The daily volleys of Qassam rockets that strike the Israeli town of Sderot and its neighboring communities offers advance notice of nature (if not the ferocity) of threatened violence were Hamas able to fulfill its threat to strike Israel’s core by bringing terrorist know-how and smuggled weapons from Gaza to the West Bank.

Repeated efforts by the administration seem based on the concept that countries can’t survive without territorial unity. Tell that to Angola or Russia, Azerbaijan or Brunei. Or to Croatia or East Timor – all of which are viable and non-contiguous – that is, separated by the sovereign soil of a foreign state. Has anyone heard of Alaska? Or tell it to any of the scores of countries that are separated by the oceans from hundreds or even thousands of their islands. Contrary to

conventional wisdom there is **no** precedent in international law or diplomatic practice that requires nations that have been formed in distinctly different territorial areas to have a link between them in order to be viable or eligible for international recognition. Territorial contiguity is not a prerequisite of statehood.

Likewise, it is often claimed that the Palestinian areas are too small to be viable. Nonsense! Many nations are smaller than the would-be state of Palestine, yet they manage just fine, thank you. Singapore, for example, is one-tenth the size of the West Bank and Gaza combined and it is doing wonderfully. Or the Muslim state of Brunei which is successful despite being both discontinuous and small.

And let us take a hard look at reality. The Hamas and Fatah gunmen in the Gaza Strip appear determined to bring Somalia's chaos to their streets. And should they fail, al-Qaeda and Islamic Jihad stand in the wings. It is bad enough that southern Israel finds itself within range of this ongoing bloodbath, but why should the Palestinians in the West Bank and the adjacent Israeli territories be subjected to this carnage via weapons and terrorists traversing central Israel? Simply put, imposing on Israel a highway for Palestinians, terrorists included, is a formula for injecting the radicalism in the Hamas-dominated Gaza Strip into the more moderate West Bank. Can this road to ruin serve any justifiable purpose?

* Justus Reid Weiner is the co-author of the new Monograph entitled "Linking the Gaza Strip with the West Bank: Implications of a Palestinian Corridor Across Israel." Professor Weiner is Scholar-in-Residence at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (www.jcpa.org), an independent multi-disciplinary think tank.