

October 6, 2010

To: President Obama

Re: The Arc Proposal for Palestine

### Pushing for a Diplomatic Breakthrough with the Arc

#### **Executive Summary**

The Arc is essentially a **transportation corridor** that would link Gaza to the major Palestinian cities in the West Bank via a high-speed rail system. By connecting the West Bank to Gaza and Palestinian cities to one another, the Arc would **stimulate commerce** and **enhance the quality of life** for all Palestinians. Strategic placement of Arc stations would facilitate the construction of new urban areas outside of existing West Bank cities so that urban density can be kept at a **sustainable level**.

Furthermore, the Arc would also **change the dynamics of negotiations** between Israel and the Palestinians, **which could lead to a breakthrough**. Even though a Palestinian state has not been finalized, many aspects of the Arc can be implemented immediately.

#### **Importance of the Problem**

- *From a security perspective*, the untenable situation in Gaza and the West Bank must be addressed to end the continued radicalization of Palestinians and Israelis, the protracted low-intensity violence between both sides, and the escalation of threats between Israel and its neighbors.
- *From an economic perspective*, the weaknesses of the Palestinian economy must be addressed in order to create jobs for the unemployed as well as the growing number of Palestinian youths. Currently, Palestinians' movement is severely curtailed due to Israeli checkpoints and a lack of infrastructure, and this stifles the Palestinian economy.
- *From a political perspective*, if a future Palestinian state is fragmented and disjointed, as the Palestinian territories are now, it is unlikely that state institutions will be effective due to the difficulties of governing and securing territories that are essentially isolated individual enclaves rather than integrated cities of one Palestinian state. Palestine must have territorial contiguity if it is to be a successful, secure state.

## **Critique of Policy Options**

Few policy analysts have proposed any solutions as to what can be done about this dire situation now. Most analysts propose that these issues be addressed only *after* Israel and the Palestinians sign a full peace accord.

Those who take this stance are mistaken on several counts. Their willingness to wait for a peace deal seems naïve given that the international community has been collectively waiting for such a peace deal since the creation of Israel in 1948. Why wait for a final deal when concrete action could be taken now to push both sides to reach a deal and to address pressing issues on the ground?

The Arc would positively impact negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians by fundamentally changing the Palestinian territories for the better: they would be unified and economically viable. Also, the Arc delineates Palestinian territory from Israeli territory based on the 1967 borders, so if the Arc is implemented, Palestinians will have more leverage to push Israel to accept these borders and Israel will have more of an incentive to agree given the reality on the ground. Furthermore, the Arc could be expanded to include stops in Israel and facilitate trade with Israel, which will be necessary between a future Palestine and Israel. Regardless of the final terms of the peace deal, Israel will benefit from a more stable, less economically depressed Palestinian state.

Rather than wait indefinitely for peace, the U.S. should act now to propel negotiations along and to address the pressing humanitarian issues that engulf the Palestinian territories.

## **Policy Recommendations**

The Arc should be adopted because it simultaneously addresses all the major issues in the Palestinian territories and would act as an impetus in peace negotiations.

### *Creating Territorial Contiguity:*

- With a transit system stretching from Gaza to cities in the West Bank, Palestine could function as a unified state rather than an amalgam of disjointed cities with no reliable means to connect to one another.
- A high-speed bus system would connect Palestinians to the Arc stations in each city.

### *Improving the Palestinian Economy:*

- The toll road built parallel to the Arc's high-speed train system would enable the easy transport of commercial and industrial materials throughout Palestine, which would in turn promote investment and job creation.
- Using the Arc, Palestinians could easily travel from one city to another to seek employment or education.
- The Arc would promote tourism and allow people to visit historic sites in Palestine easily and safely.

*Planning for the Future:*

- The Arc would help Palestine, a small state, cope with its expected rapid population growth.
- In order to prevent high levels of urban sprawl, the Arc station in each city would be built outside of the city proper; thus, new urban areas would be constructed around the Arc station, enabling the historic city to retain a sustainable number of residents and buildings.
- By planning for the inevitable population growth and taking pro-active steps to reduce high urban density and overcrowding, the Arc would ensure a viable Palestine.

*Propelling Peace Negotiations Forward:*

- The Arc would alter the power dynamics between the two sides by providing Palestinian negotiators with tangible evidence of Palestine's ability to succeed as a state.
- The Arc's presence and the unity of Gaza and the West Bank would compel Israel to accept the necessity of a Palestinian state.
- The Arc offers both sides dividends: Israel would benefit from an economically strengthened, stable Palestine and Palestinians would benefit from territorial contiguity, more employment opportunities, and the means to expand sustainably.

*The Bottom Line:*

- The projected costs of the Arc are no higher than similar international initiatives that have been completed successfully.
- U.S. investment in the Arc would be a wise use of foreign aid because it would ostensibly lead to a breakthrough in negotiations as well as address all the pressing security, political, economic, and humanitarian issues in Gaza and the West Bank.
- The U.S. should urge President Abbas to adopt the Arc plan immediately. Furthermore, the U.S. should pledge immediate financial aid to support construction of the Arc and call on its allies to do likewise.

*I certify that this essay is my own work.*