Lieberman's 'peace' plan: Strip Palestinians of citizenship

Blueprint requires pure Jewish state

Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's far-right foreign minister, set out last week what he called a "blueprint for a resolution to the conflict" with the Palestinians that demands most of the country's large Palestinian minority be stripped of citizenship and relocated outside Israel's future borders.

Warning Israel faced growing diplomatic pressure for a full withdrawal to the Green Line, the pre-1967 border, Mr Lieberman said that, if such a partition were implemented, "the conflict will inevitably pass beyond those borders and into Israel".

He accused many of Israel's 1.3 million Palestinian citizens of acting against Israel while their leaders "actively assist those who want to destroy the Jewish state".

Mr Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu party campaigned in last year's elections on a platform of "No loyalty, no citizenship" and has proposed a raft of loyalty laws over the past year targeted at the Palestinian minority.

True peace, the foreign minister claimed, would come only with land swaps, or "an exchange of populated territories to create two largely homogeneous states, one Jewish Israeli and the other Arab Palestinian". He added that under his plan "those Arabs who were in Israel will now receive Palestinian citizenship".

Unusually, Mr Lieberman, who is also deputy prime minister, offered his plan in a commentary for the English-language Jerusalem Post daily newspaper, apparently in an attempt to make maximum impact on the international community.

He has spoken repeatedly in the past about drawing the borders in a way to forcibly exchange Palestinian communities in Israel for the Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

But under orders from Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, he has kept a relatively low profile on the conflict's larger issues since his controversial appointment to head the foreign ministry more than a year ago.

In early 2009, Mr Lieberman, who lives in the West Bank settlement of Nokdim, upset his own supporters by advocating the creation of "a viable Palestinian state", though he has remained unclear about what it would require in practice.

Mr Lieberman's revival of his "population transfer" plan — an idea he unveiled six years ago — comes as the Israeli leadership has understood that it is "isolated like never before", according to Michael Warschawski, an Israeli analyst.

Mr Netanyahu's government has all but stopped paying lip service to US-sponsored "proximity talks" with the Palestinians after outraging global public opinion with attacks on Gaza 18 months ago and on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla four weeks ago in which nine peace activists were killed.

Israel's relations with the international community are likely to deteriorate further in late summer when a 10-month partial freeze on settlement expansion in the West Bank expires. Last week, Mr Netanyahu refused to answer questions about the freeze, after a vote by his Likud party's central committee to support renewed settlement building from late September.

Other looming diplomatic headaches for Israel are the return of the Goldstone Report, which suggested Israel committed war crimes in its attack on Gaza, to the United Nations General Assembly in late July, and Turkey's adoption of the rotating presidency of the Security Council in September.

Mr Warschawski, a founder of the Alternative Information Centre, a joint Israeli-Palestinian advocacy group, said that, faced with these crises, Israel's political elite had split into two camps.

Most, including Mr Lieberman, believed Israel should "push ahead" with its unilateral policies towards the Palestinians and refuse to engage in a peace process regardless of the likely international repercussions.

"Israel's ruling elite knows that the only solution to the conflict acceptable to the international community is an end to the occupation along the lines of the Clinton parameters," he said, referring to the two-state solution promoted by former US president Bill Clinton in late 2000.

"None of them, not even Ehud Barak [the defence minister and head of the centrist Labour Party], are ready to accept this as the basis for negotiations."

On the other hand, Tzipi Livni, the head of the centre-right opposition Kadima party, Mr Warschawski said, wanted to damp down the international backlash by engaging in direct negotiations with the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank under Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr Lieberman's commentary came a day after he told Ms Livni that she could join the government only if she accepted "the principle of trading territory and population as the solution to the Palestinian issue, and give up the principle of land for peace".

Mr Lieberman is reportedly concerned that Mr Netanyahu might seek to bring Ms Livni into a national unity government to placate the US and prop up the legitimacy of his coalition.

The Labour Party has threatened to quit the government if Kadima does not join by the end of September, and Ms Livni is reported to want the foreign ministry.

Mr Lieberman's position is further threatened by a series of corruption investigations.

However, he also appears keen to take the initiative from both Washington and Ms Livni with his own "peace plan". An unnamed aide to Mr Lieberman told the Jerusalem Post that, with a vacuum in the diplomatic process, the foreign minister "thinks he can convince the government to adopt the plan".

However, Mr Warschawski said there were few indications that Mr Netanyahu wanted to be involved in any peace process, even Mr Lieberman's.

Last week Uzi Arad, the government's shadowy national security adviser and a long-time confidant of Mr Netanyahu, made a rare public statement at a meeting of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to attack Ms Livni for "political adventurism" and believing in the "magic" of a two-state solution.

Apparently reflecting Mr Netanyahu's own thinking, he said: "The more you market Palestinian legitimacy, the more you bring about a detraction of Israel's legitimacy in certain circles. [The Palestinians] are accumulating legitimacy, and we are being delegitimised."

Mr Warschawski doubted that Mr Lieberman believed his blueprint for population exchanges could be implemented but was promoting it chiefly to further damage the standing of Israel's Palestinian citizens and advance his own political ambitions.

In his commentary, Mr Lieberman said the international community's peace plan would lead to "the one-and-a-half to half state solution": "a homogeneous, pure Palestinian state", from which Jewish settlers were expelled, and "a binational state in Israel", which included many Palestinian citizens.

Palestinians, in both the territories and inside Israel, he said, could not "continue to incite against Israel, glorify murder, stigmatise Israel in international forums, boycott Israeli goods and mount legal offensives against Israeli officials".

International law, he added, sanctioned the partition of territory in which ethnic communities were broken up into different states, including in the case of the former Yugoslavia. "In most cases there is no physical population transfer or the demolition of houses, but creating a border where none existed, according to demographics," he wrote.

Surveys have shown that Palestinian citizens are overwhelming opposed to "population transfer" schemes like Mr Lieberman's.

Critics note that Mr Lieberman has failed to show how the many Palestinian communities inside Israel that are located far from the Green Line could be incorporated into a Palestinian state without expulsions.

Legal experts also point out that, even if Israel managed to trade territory as part of a peace agreement, stripping Palestinians of their Israeli citizenship as a result of such a deal would violate international law.

Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto

Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net.

A version of this article originally appeared in The National (www.thenational.ae), published in Abu Dhabi.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © Jonathan Cook, Global Research, 2010

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Jonathan Cook