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Cc: Sullivan, Jacob J; Abedin, Huma; Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: If bilateral talks fail, a regional approach

For your Sunday reading, a summary of an interesting proposal by former Jordanian foreign minister Marwan Muasher.

“Palestinian-Israeli Direct Talks: The Case for a Regional Approach” By Marwan Muasher (Carnegie Endowment Bulletin, August 2010)

Marwan Muasher – former Jordanian foreign minister, ambassador, and deputy prime minister – advocates a regional settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, capitalizing on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. His approach depends first on securing end-game “deposits” from all parties: The parties would offer hypothetical commitments that they might not be willing to give at the onset, but that can be “deposited” with the U.S. and committed to only if the other side is willing to do the same. Saudi Arabia’s deposit, for instance, would outline and agree to a package that included details about Jerusalem. The Saudi package would also promise to secure Arab and Muslim backing for the painful compromises the Palestinians would need to accept.

Muasher advocates a similar approach to the Syrian track—asking Syria to deposit end-game commitments in return for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. In their deposits, the Saudis and the Syrians must clearly commit to address the inclusion of Hamas and Hezbollah in any regional agreement. The Arab states would not only have to end all logistical, financial, and military support for these two groups, but they would have to assume responsibility for delivering these two actors, helping to transform them into political players. Israel’s deposit would spell out its commitment to a solution based on 1967 borders and a return of the Golan.

According to Muasher, these deposits would make it much easier for President Abbas to engage in talks aimed at ending the conflict. After he has been given Arab cover, Abbas could provide his own end-game deposits. According to Muasher, absent these commitments from the Arab states, the Palestinian positions will remain maximalist. Once the U.S. has deposits from all sides that make for a reasonable, comprehensive package, it should put this package on the table in cooperation with the Quartet. Once the comprehensive package is presented, the U.S. can focus on confidence-building measures to move all sides toward the end game.

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