



Safe Passage Between Gaza and the West Bank Now? Only with Guarantees for Permanent Status

The World Bank is currently conducting a US-funded research, examining various alternatives for the implementation of "Safe Passage" between the West Bank and Gaza (elevated road, sunken road or railroad). Israel should soon decide whether to support the research.

What is the Issue?

- Prior to 1967 there was no Safe Passage between Gaza and the West Bank.
- In the Camp David Accords (9/78) and the Declaration of Principles (9/93), Israel accepted the principle of Gaza and the West Bank as a "Single Territorial Unit".
- The practical significance of this principle was embodied in arrangements regarding passage between Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the Interim Agreement (9/95). These arrangements have not been implemented.
- The "Safe Passage Protocol" (10/99) stipulated alternative arrangements to the Interim Agreement. This Protocol has not been fully implemented either.
- Israel has clarified that the Safe Passage arrangements are provisional only. The Safe Passage Protocol clearly states that the arrangements provided included in the Protocol "are without prejudice to the permanent status negotiations".
- During the Permanent Status negotiations (9/99-1/01) the Safe Passage was presented as compensation for the Palestinians for not receiving 100% of the West Bank territory. According to the Clinton Ideas, the Palestinians were supposed to receive 95%-99% of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip *and* the Safe Passage.
- According to the Geneva Initiative, the Palestinians receive 100% of the West Bank *and* a Safe Passage between Gaza and the West Bank.
- The "Disengagement Plan" did not include a reference to the issue of Safe Passage. However, in the Quartet's comments on the Disengagement Plan (9/20/05), it clarified that in the future Palestinian State, Gaza and the West Bank should be contiguous.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- Thus far, the issue of the Safe Passage was perceived to be a territorial one (see drafts of Permanent Status Agreement).
- *However*, it is a systemic issue, relating to security, economic and civil modalities, such as border regime, customs arrangements and control over airspace.
- Additionally, the Safe Passage is of high strategic importance to the Palestinians. Therefore, Israel should exhaust the economic, political and military potential that the Safe Passage entails *prior* to Permanent Status Agreement, *within* the Permanent Status Agreement and *During* the Permanent Status.

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- The reality on the ground will not enable clear distinction between Israeli and Palestinian sovereign space. Hence, During the Permanent Status, there will be reciprocal intrusions into each state's sovereign space. For Example:
 - **Palestinian intrusions:** The Safe Passage and Desalination Sites for the Northern West Bank will intrude Israel's sovereign space.
 - **Israeli Intrusions:** Israel's security needs, primarily maintaining control over air space and electro magnetic spectrum in the West Bank, will intrude Palestinian sovereign space.

Policy Options

- The Safe Passage and all the other arrangements for connecting Gaza with the West Bank are of the strongest cards that Israel holds in the Permanent Status negotiations.
- For example, there could be a clear linkage between the Safe Passage and Israel's intrusion of Palestinian air space.
- Israel should leverage the Safe Passage card to the largest extent in order to protect its interests in the Permanent Status.

For additional sources see the Re'ut Institute website: www.reut-institute.org:

- About territorial contiguosness of Gaza and the West Bank see - Terms and Concepts: "[Gaza Strip](#)", "[West Bank](#)" (Draft), "[Declaration of Principles](#)" (Hebrew), "[Disengagement Plan](#)"; Systemic Overview: "[End of Responsibility in Gaza](#)" (Translation Draft); Policy Paper: "[End of Responsibility in Gaza: Policy Options](#)" (Hebrew Draft); Point of View: "[Is the Customs Envelope Still Relevant?](#)"; Fundamental Early Warning: "[The End of the Era of the Israeli-Palestinian Customs Envelope](#)".
- About Permanent Status and Intrusive Issues see – Concepts: "[Intrusive Issues](#)", "[Personal Security Issues](#)"; Point of View: "[A Palestinian Desalination Plant in Cesaria? Not Without Air Space!](#)" (Hebrew).

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