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## The new partition plan

By [Aluf Benn](#)

The gates of Gaza have been barely shut behind us, the settlements' debris is still strewn across the territory. Yet Prime Minister Ariel Sharon already is launching relations with the Palestinian Authority in the post-disengagement era with threats of disrupting West Bank elections should Hamas decide to contend in them.

This is the main message Sharon brought to the UN General Assembly and reiterated in every official meeting.

In demanding Hamas' exclusion, Sharon is defying PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas' main effort to integrate the opposition and terror organizations into politics. Abbas says this is how they would become part of the establishment and fit in gradually to form "one authority, one law and one gun." Sharon also is placing the American administration in a dilemma between its two main principles: advancing Arab democracy in general, and Palestinian democracy in particular, versus the relentless war on terror and its organizations.

Sharon placed the problem on the agenda, and has four months to find a solution. But the significance of his threats transcends the clumsy attempt to dictate the Palestinians' list of candidates and election platforms. It pertains to the root of the Palestinian entity's existence, and undermines the link between its two parts in Gaza and the West Bank.

From the day the talks about the disengagement started, Sharon has strived to fixate the different status of Gaza and the West Bank and to thwart Palestinian attempts to maintain a connection between the two. First he did so with the borders: Israel evacuated the Gaza Strip up to the Green Line, and gave up all of its territorial demands there, while demanding annexation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank settlement blocs. When the argument arose over control of the Rafah border crossing, Israel threatened to exclude Gaza from the joint customs agreement, thus creating two separate, disconnected Palestinian economies. The PA, meanwhile, tried to condition coordination of the disengagement on Israel's promise to revive the "safe passage" from Gaza to the West Bank.

Now the issue of the Palestinian elections has risen, and Sharon is again talking of partition. In Gaza, the Palestinians will do as they wish, while in the West Bank, they will be forced to accept Israel's dictates. If they don't, their candidates and voters will have difficulty moving on the blocked roads.

Clearly Sharon is using the separation of Gaza from the West Bank as a bargaining chip in his relations with Abbas, like a big stick perpetuating Israeli supremacy even after the disengagement.

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It is clear that he is washing his hands of the forgotten clause in the Oslo Accords, that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are "one territorial unit." However, his consistent policy raises suspicion that there is more at play here than bullying tactics toward the PA. It is clear that someone is laying the ground for a new order to replace the accepted idea of establishing one state divided into two parts, "Eastern Palestine" in the West Bank and "Western Palestine" in the Gaza Strip.

Officials and figures in the Israeli defense establishment speak of their desire to reinstate the pre-1967 situation, when Egypt took care of the Gaza Strip and Jordan took care of the West Bank. They are encouraged by Egypt's willingness to take responsibility for the Philadelphi route and to train the Palestinian defense forces in the Gaza Strip, which would enable Cairo to supervise the area indirectly.

The more Sharon establishes the difference in the status of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and as long as the PA has difficulty imposing its authority, the more these ideas will garner support in Israel. A serious public discourse already is required about whether the two-state solution has evaporated with the disengagement's implementation.