



The Bitterlemons Guide to the Arab Peace Initiative

New thinking on a key Middle East proposal

Edited by Yossi Alpher, Ghassan Khatib and Charmaine Seitz

bitterlemons.net

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The logo for Bitterlemons.net features a dark horizontal bar with a thin olive-green line above it. The text "bitterlemons.net" is written in a lowercase, serif font. A small, stylized white lemon is positioned between the "s" and ".net".

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Preface

The Arab Peace Initiative, brainchild of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, offers Israel normal relations with the Arab world in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from land occupied in 1967 and a just solution to the refugee problem based on United Nations Resolution 194. The initiative was adopted by the Arab League at its March 27, 2002 summit in Beirut, and support for the proposal has been renewed numerous times.

US President Barack Obama's administration also adopted the API as part of its Middle East policy and the Quartet, a working group on the Middle East that comprises the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States, has backed the initiative in its statements.

Despite these nods to its importance, the API has gained little traction on the ground. Believing the initiative is key to regional peace efforts, the creators of the *bitterlemons* publications, Yossi Alpher and Ghassan Khatib, dedicated editions of the web magazines to the initiative during the years 2002-2010. Still, they felt more effort was needed.

The *bitterlemons* publications were born in 2001 with *bitterlemons.org*, a weekly web magazine featuring Israelis and Palestinians writing on contemporary issues. *Bitterlemons-international.org* began in 2003 to offer a similar space for issues concerning the wider Middle East, now including authors from all over the world. In 2005, the now dormant *bitterlemons-dialogue.org* was added to the family, publishing correspondence between two authors of different backgrounds on a chosen subject. *Bitterlemons* seemed the natural home for a publication dedicated to the API.

In 2010, funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union enabled the *bitterlemons* publications to establish a new web magazine, *bitterlemons-api.org*, dedicated exclusively to issues involving the Arab Peace Initiative. In November 2010, guest authors began analyzing the API—itsself a short, concentrated document—clause by clause and word for word, and exploring broader, related issues.

With the explosion of revolutions in the Arab world in the spring of 2011, however, the editors began to sense that the API was being pushed aside. New realities were taking hold. By then, 16 editions of *bitterlemons-api* had been published, creating a unique and comprehensive set of

analyses of the document and related issues. The editors decided to stop production and create an online book of the findings.

The European Union, now *bitterlemons'* exclusive funder, readily recognized the value of publishing a virtual book about the API in line with *The Best of Bitterlemons* book produced in 2007. To that end, *bitterlemons* has established a fifth website, bitterlemons-books.org, accessible at the portal, bitterlemons.net. This website will house the full set of *bitterlemons* books available for free download, including this *Bitterlemons Guide to the Arab Peace Initiative*.

This volume commences with separate forewords by Khatib and Alpher. Subsequent essays and interviews are divided into subject areas exploring the birth of the API, responses to the initiative and a comprehensive analysis of its text. They serve as both an analytic record and an investment in the possibilities for a peaceful resolution of the broader Middle East conflict.

Palestinian Foreword

Never completely out of style

What is happening today in the Arab world—the toppling of dictatorial regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, the mass protests that continue to rock Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, and the hesitant reforms underway in Jordan and Morocco—places the Arab world at a crossroads.

It is an intersection that I have been warning of for a long time. On the one hand, for the first time in decades, the Arab peoples have an opportunity to decide their own destiny through democracy and by simply raising their voices to demand freedom and opportunity. On the other hand, the shift underway looks very likely to bring to power Islamist movements that have gained credence and organization by preaching to the downtrodden and against the West for its support of Israel and of cruel dictators throughout the Middle East.

For years, many of us have said that the international community's lack of attention to the rights of Palestinians was causing moderates to lose ground in the region. Among Palestinians, the contest between Hamas and Fateh is a prime example. In the last two decades, since negotiations began between Israel and the nationalist, secular Palestine Liberation Organization, the main achievement of the PLO (the signing of the Oslo accords) has run aground. Negotiations with Israel have failed to achieve any major changes since the 1998 signing of the Wye River accords. Instead what has changed has been the layout of the land, ever more devoured by Israel's settlement project.

In contrast, Islamist movements in the region led by Hizballah and Hamas have been able to claim repeated success: Israel's 1995 withdrawal from Lebanon and 2005 Lebanon war debacle, its unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip after Hamas resistance, and just this year, the swap of over a thousand Palestinian prisoners for one Israeli soldier held captive by Hamas. While Israel's withdrawal from Gaza could have been negotiated with Palestinian peace partners, thus strengthening them and their vision, Israel chose instead to depart Gaza unilaterally, leaving a vacuum behind that was filled immediately by a strengthened Islamist rejectionist front.

Quantitatively, violence seems to be the only way to gain Palestinian freedom. While Hamas itself has struggled to remain legitimate as the

leader of blockaded Gaza, its path of resistance and Islamic fervor remains attractive to many.

But for those of us who believe in the value of peaceful protest and negotiations, there was always another way. There is still another way.

The Arab Peace Initiative offered Israel and its western allies a path to a regional solution. In exchange for ending its occupation in place since 1967, Israel would achieve a comprehensive peace with the Arab (and Muslim) world. Had Israel done even the minimum in exploring this option, offered in 2002, the worst of the second Palestinian uprising could have been arrested. Islamist movements in Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan would have lost their footing. Palestinians could have achieved their state, a peaceful neighbor to Israel, instead of finding themselves divided between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, with no clear path forward.

It was the commitment to somehow breath life into this prospect that brought us to create bitterlemons-api.org, dedicated to the Arab Peace Initiative. Those who object to the initiative often do so on the grounds that it is short in detail and implementation. We thought that asking experts to write on the proposal could help flesh out the possibilities. US President Barack Obama adopted the initiative as part of his administration's policy early on. We thought that just talking about the API could help revive its viability.

Today, we are looking at a changed Middle East. The leaders that once promoted the API are either no longer in power or are gun-shy from Israel's turn to the right and their own publics' sudden voice. It is hard to imagine that the API would have been adopted were it on the table today. It is not that the Arab public opposes a fair and just peace, but rather that it is not convinced that Israel is at all serious about making that happen.

Still, it is my belief that a peaceful settlement based on the two-state solution along the 1967 borders and an agreed-upon resolution of the refugee problem on the basis of UN resolutions will never truly go out of style. We have a tough road ahead—Palestinians and their neighbors—but ultimately we will return to the Arab Peace Initiative and Israel's withdrawal of occupied land in exchange for normal relations. When that time comes, we hope that this volume and the work done by bitterlemons will be a useful resource.

Ghassan Khatib
Ramallah, Palestine

Israeli Foreword

What I've learned about the API

In the course of late-2010 and early 2011, we published 65 analytical articles on the Arab Peace Initiative. Now we are “binding” them into a book. What lessons of substance have I learned from the experience? One fairly obvious conclusion is that, under current circumstances of Arab revolution and a dormant peace process, the API is not about to be implemented in the near future.

On the other hand, the API offers a regional solution in a region where nearly all relevant countries are undergoing some sort of rethinking, violent or otherwise, of their internal structure and where public opinion is becoming increasingly relevant. Accordingly, the API is likely to remain relevant—unless, in the kind of worst-case scenario we Israelis like to ponder, events propel to power Islamist movements that refuse to endorse the API's concept of normal relations and regional security arrangements with post-peace Israel.

Our in-depth investigation of the API has led me to conclude that both sides, Israel and the Arab states led into the API by Saudi Arabia, could have done more to advance its implementation. Israel could have accepted it, perhaps with a reservation or two. Arab leaders could have marketed it to Israel in a more forthcoming way, whether in summit meetings with Israeli leaders or among the public and in the media. They could have offered explanations and a readiness to implement the API in phases that correspond with Israeli peacemaking. Both sides could have done more to bring about additional Arab-Israel peace agreements, without which the API will never become a reality.

Here, I am frequently reminded of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's response to the API, voiced in April 2002 in the midst of fierce Israeli-Palestinian fighting in the West Bank. We recall that the API's birth at a Beirut Arab League summit in March 2002 was paralleled by a horrific suicide bombing in Israel that triggered a major military invasion of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. “If [then] Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is serious about his initiative,” Sharon stated at the time, “then let him come to Jerusalem to present it to us.”

Sharon's statement embodied everything that was and is wrong with both sides' approach to the API. Sharon himself never really believed in

peace with our neighbors and never trusted their leaders; he was clearly speaking cynically. But Abdullah and his fellow Arab leaders apparently never for a moment intended the API as anything but an ultimatum to Israel. The last thing on their minds was the idea of actually addressing Israelis face-to-face and explaining their initiative in the spirit (evoked by Sharon, perhaps unintentionally) of Anwar Sadat in 1977.

Let's hope we all get another chance, and that this online book can provide the kind of depth and perspective required to keep the Arab Peace Initiative alive and relevant.

Yossi Alpher

Ramat HaSharon, Israel

THE TEXT OF THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

adopted by the Arab League on March 8, 2002

The Council of Arab States at the Summit Level at its 14th Ordinary Session,

Reaffirming the resolution taken in June 1996 at the Cairo Extra-Ordinary Arab Summit that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the strategic option of the Arab countries, to be achieved in accordance with international legality, and which would require a comparable commitment on the part of the Israeli government,

Having listened to the statement made by his royal highness Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, crown prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in which his highness presented his initiative calling for full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the land-for-peace principle, and Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive peace with Israel,

Emanating from the conviction of the Arab countries that a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace or provide security for the parties, the council:

1. Requests Israel to reconsider its policies and declare that a just peace is its strategic option as well.
2. Further calls upon Israel to affirm:
 - I- Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.
 - II- Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194.
 - III- The acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since

June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

3. Consequently, the Arab countries affirm the following:
 - I- Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region.
 - II- Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.
4. Assures the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries.
5. Calls upon the government of Israel and all Israelis to accept this initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace and stop the further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighborliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity.
6. Invites the international community and all countries and organizations to support this initiative.
7. Requests the chairman of the summit to form a special committee composed of some of its concerned member states and the secretary general of the League of Arab States to pursue the necessary contacts to gain support for this initiative at all levels, particularly from the United Nations, the Security Council, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the Muslim states and the European Union.

CONCEIVING THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Genesis, development and present status

by Nabeel Shaath

It was in early 2002 that the idea of an Arab peace initiative was born. After the failure of the Camp David negotiations, the end of the presidency of Bill Clinton and the election of Ariel Sharon, the intifada was raging, turning into a violent confrontation. Israeli settlement policy, Hamas' suicide bombings and Israeli bloody attacks, incursions and siege threatened to destroy the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Early efforts to save the day, including the Sharm al-Sheikh summits and the Mitchell report, did not bring any relief. The events of September 11 had taken place a few months earlier, and the American mood was ominous. The Bush administration was determined to go to war. All that had been built since 1988 was in jeopardy.

Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had started his own mediation with the Bush administration to urge a more positive American involvement in the peace process some weeks before 9/11. But, with the revelations about the participation of many Saudi nationals in the al-Qaida attacks, these efforts were aborted. Ideas of new initiatives were suggested to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. The Thomas Friedman article brought the "Saudi initiative" to the world's attention. The initiative was received with a lot of interest. I was invited by the crown prince to discuss the initiative. After the initial meeting and consultations with President Yasser Arafat, who supported the initiative, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and I travelled again to Saudi Arabia for further discussions.

The Saudis later invited Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to talks. Other consultations took place, all of which led to major discussions in meetings of Arab foreign ministers designed to gain Arab acceptance for turning the crown prince's initiative into an Arab initiative.

In our consultations, the proposal was refined to gain Palestinian and Arab support, and official adoption. The crown prince was encouraged by

general reaction, particularly from Palestinian and Israeli public opinion polls, which were quite positive. The mood in Riyadh was buoyant.

In the refinement process, an “independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital” was added, as was a “just solution of the refugee problem to be agreed upon, in accordance with resolution 194”. This formulation had already been discussed in the Camp David and the Taba negotiations. The initiative was ready for Arab adoption. During the refinement stage, some skepticism was voiced in many Arab quarters, but that opposition ended once the final draft was reached.

The Arab Summit of Beirut on March 27, 2002 unanimously approved the initiative, turning it officially into an Arab peace plan. Later on, the Organization of the Islamic Conference Summit approved the plan, transforming an offer made initially by 22 countries into a further regional solution of 57 countries sponsoring and supporting the peace plan.

The achievement is in effect formidable. This was the first time ever that a unanimously-accepted Arab plan offered Israel peace agreements, recognition, and normalization of relations in return for its fulfillment of its obligations under resolutions 242 and 338 of the United Nations Security Council, and Resolution 194 of the General Assembly, thus accepting Israel on the borders of 1967, and considering that the Arab-Israel conflict would come to an end once Israel fulfills its obligations.

The euphoria received its first violent shock with Israel's “Defensive Shield” operation on March 29, two days after the Beirut summit decision was taken. The operation, taking place after Hamas’ Netanya suicide operation, led to the full reoccupation of the West Bank. No direct official Israeli response to the Arab initiative was issued, but several Israeli suggestions attempted to reverse the order of implementation of the Arab peace plan by asking for normalization with the Arabs first, before Israel offers anything in return, thus vitiating the whole idea of the initiative.

The Saudis, with Palestinian support, continued to push for the initiative, succeeding in getting the Arab League to form a ministerial follow-up committee to keep the plan alive and to obtain international support. The initiative received praise from international sources including the US, and was included in the preamble of the roadmap and in a United Nations Security Council resolution. Despite the generally negative Israeli position, the Arab Peace Initiative remains the official Palestinian and Arab position on the end result of the peace process. It was never rescinded or retracted.

At present, there is not much that can be expected given the current position of the Israeli government. Early rounds of negotiations showed Israeli regression—not only from anything resembling the Arab peace plan, but from all the agreed terms of reference governing the peace process so far. On the ground, a systematic policy of de-arabizing East Jerusalem, deepening occupation of the West Bank through the settlement process, full military occupation, and denial of jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority required under the Oslo agreements constitute real barriers to any hope for progress in the peace process during the present Israeli government. If you add the savage and illegal Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip, hope for the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative grows even dimmer.

Israel has refused to honor its obligations under previous agreements and international law. At the same time, unfortunately, there is a lack of international will to enforce international law in Palestine.

This dark scenario has led the Palestinians and the Arab League to start discussing alternatives to the present framework of negotiations.

The current situation has only enabled the Israeli colonization of our land while some third parties keep talking about the importance of a “peace process” that has nothing of peace and a lot of process. Keeping the Arab Peace Initiative in the horizon, we are exploring options to get to this goal, including our call for international recognition of the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as its admission as full member to the United Nations.

In conclusion, the Arab initiative is still there: a Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic commitment. Calls for withdrawing it have failed to get any support. As long as there is any hope of resolving the Arab-Israel conflict, with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at its core, the two-state solution remains the best road to peace. Therefore, the Arab peace plan will remain the guideline for achieving and supporting it. This is at present the official Palestinian policy, and it is Arab official policy as well.

How long can this policy survive? That is difficult to predict. It depends a lot on what will develop in the Israeli political scene during the coming months.—*Published November 10, 2010*

Not only still relevant, but desirable

by Marwan Muasher

As someone closely associated with the development and drafting of the Arab Peace Initiative, I find it instructive to remember why and how that document came into being. The year was 2002, 14 months after formal negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis ended at Taba with the divide between the two sides largely bridged in principle, yet still without formal agreement. With negotiations suspended, Ariel Sharon in power in Israel, violence on both sides and a United States administration preoccupied after the 9/11 attacks, any hope for reaching an agreement between the two sides had evaporated. Both publics, Israeli and Palestinian, had shifted dramatically to the right with an entrenched belief that the other side was not serious about peace.

Given this atmosphere, it was important to move the goalposts and change the context within which negotiations were conducted so that peace prospects could be reinvigorated. The incremental approach had exhausted its possibilities by then and had not resulted in a final status agreement that would put the conflict to rest once and for all. The maximum that either side felt it could give did not meet the minimum demands of the other—although it was close on both ends. A bold initiative was required, one that would allow both sides to reach a settlement that served their national interests instead of relying on international pressure to cajole them to act.

The central premise of the Arab Peace Initiative is that it shifts the emphasis from incremental, bilateral negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis to a comprehensive package between every Arab country and Israel. By offering such a comprehensive regional agreement, the initiative attempts to address the needs and concerns of all the key players, including Israel, Palestinians, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the whole Arab world.

The Arab Peace Initiative calls for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, including on the Golan Heights, and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. But it also addresses all the major needs of the average Israeli: a collective peace agreement with all Arab states, security guarantees with the Arab world, an end to the conflict with no further claims (designed to address Israeli concerns that Arabs will demand pre-1948 Palestinian territories), and an agreed solution to the refugee problem. Implicit is that the Arab Peace Initiative's reference to

security guarantees signifies an Arab obligation to deliver Hamas and Hizballah and transform them into purely political organizations.

The formulation of the Arab Peace Initiative proved to be difficult. While the Saudis and we wanted a simple formulation that was not loaded with details and that would send a clear and powerful signal to the Israelis—full withdrawal for full normalization with the Arab world—the Syrians and the Lebanese wanted a clear reference to all UN resolutions, including General Assembly Resolution 194. In fact, the Lebanese were not satisfied with implementing 194, which calls for the return of willing refugees back to their homes and for compensation for those not wishing to return. Lebanon wanted even those who choose compensation to leave. We struggled with finding a text that would uphold international law but would also send a clear signal that Arabs were looking for a practical solution that does not imply a demand for four million refugees to go back. After much work, I believe we managed to do that.

A regional settlement provides both parties with a regional safety net. For Palestinians and Syrians, it assures Arab (and Muslim) acceptance of an agreement that involves historic decisions on their part. For Israelis, it ensures regional peace, security and acceptance, not with part of the Palestinians but with the entire region. This was clearly the intention of King (then Crown Prince) Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who wanted to signal to the Israelis and the international community that Arabs are committed to peace in return for an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab land. Similarly, the reference to an agreed solution to the refugee problem indicates that Arabs are serious about finding an acceptable and practical solution to this issue. This was the spirit of the meeting, which resulted in unanimous acceptance of the proposal by all Arab states.

The Arab Peace Initiative should be viewed as a bold step to move beyond the failed incremental approach, rather than a rigid proposal. This is why it is even more relevant today.

To claim there are no easy solutions to the Arab-Israel conflict is to state the obvious. There is little chance for a breakthrough in direct talks between Palestinians and Israelis today, meaning that time has almost run out on a two-state solution. It is unlikely that further negotiations between the two parties will change these conditions. But a regional agreement, one that is based on both the Clinton parameters and the Arab Peace Initiative, is both possible and—I dare say—desirable for the two sides. The conflict has finally reached a point where postponing difficult decisions today in the hope of better conditions tomorrow only creates conditions that will prove even harder to address in the future.- *Published November 10, 2010*

Happy to be proven wrong

by Ezzedine Choukri Fishere

It was chilling in Jerusalem in January 2002, and not only because of the weather. The sandbags, the metal detectors, the security guards with their visible guns at entrances to restaurants, malls, hospitals—almost a guard for every door. This was a country seized by a deep sense of threat and disillusionment. In the West Bank, a second winter of heavy repression closed and terrorized villages and towns. Those who had to leave their homes for work, an errand or a family visit, couldn't know when, if, they would come back. This was a whole nation denied hope, and grounded. On both sides, this was another winter of killing, with each side doing its best to hurt the other, in the flesh.

For me and my colleagues in the United Nations' political office, this was another year of oscillation between hope and fury. After numerous diplomatic failures, we thought that what Israelis and Palestinians needed most was listening—truly listening—to each other. The two sides mirrored one another's image and most of their needs were compatible, if not mutually dependent. There was a solution to their conflict, but it couldn't be reached as long as they ignored each other. The killing spree was not only cruel, it was unnecessary. If each side expressed its concern in a way that made sense to the other, they would be able to find common ground. But they didn't. As we shuttled between the two killing fields, we were revolted by the parties' self-centeredness, yet hopeful that one day we would find a way to break this infernal circle.

Then came the news of a brewing Arab peace initiative. We got excited; this could be the opening we were looking for. If only we could convince the Arabs to speak a language Israelis could relate to. At the Arab League Summit in Beirut's Phoenicia Hotel, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and his senior colleagues talked to Arab leaders while my colleagues and I discussed, more bluntly, with our counterparts. We asked: why won't Arab leaders be more forceful in affirming their willingness to accept Israel as a normal member of the region? Why can't Arab leaders fly to Jerusalem and speak to the Israelis directly? What is the point of mentioning the right of return if the objective is an agreed solution on refugees?

Our interlocutors were on a different level. Almost everyone at the Phoenicia Hotel anticipated a negative reaction from Israel's prime

minister: “Sharon is not interested in peace,” many concurred. “This would be politically foolish,” a senior diplomat explained. “In the absence of a binding deal, any concession made in the initiative will be pocketed by the Israeli government and become the new baseline. And you from the UN will come next time to ask us for more concessions.”

They pointed to the disillusionment of Arab public opinion after ten years of sterile negotiations and after Arafat “gave Israel everything”. No Arab leader can afford to make a positive gesture toward Israel while it represses the Palestinians and expands settlements, they said. We retorted: “but look at Sadat’s example” referring to the Egyptian president’s historic trip to Jerusalem. They retorted back: “Exactly! Look how Begin ‘rewarded’ Sadat’s gesture, look how the story ended.” For them, these were real-life political realities. For my UN colleagues, this was lack of leadership and vision.

I left my UN colleagues and wandered among Arab diplomats. I asked friends and former colleagues why Arab leaders bother at all coming up with an initiative if their assessment of the situation is so bleak. Some trivialized the whole affair: “The initiative says nothing new; we have been saying mutual recognition and 1967 borders for 30 years. Why is this suddenly interesting?” Others speculated that the Saudi initiative was not meant to resolve the Arab-Israel conflict but to salvage Saudi-American relations, which were on the rocks since 9/11. Many spoke of irritation and suspicion among Arab leaders at the initiative: “Look who is present and who is absent.”

We argued and argued the merits of “speaking to the other side”, but what we said didn’t count much. Arab officials were too busy struggling with their own political realities to pay attention to what foreign diplomats said. After pushing and pulling, the crafty Arab League chief drafted a compromise text while, ominously, a senior Saudi official had a heart attack and was carried out of the meeting on a stretcher.

The text of the initiative wasn’t a resounding example of public diplomacy, but it was the best one could hope for given political constraints. I thought that its message would resonate with the Israelis who wanted to believe that the conflict wasn’t inescapable, a kind of fate that they, the tragic heroes, have to face, and that what they thought to be an irreconcilably hostile Arab world was ready to accept them as neighbors.

But I was wrong. Words couldn’t compete with political realities; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon dismissed the initiative almost immediately and the international community’s interest in it faded. When a bloody suicide

bombing at a Passover celebration was followed by a bloody invasion of the West Bank, talk about peace ceased.

The Arab Peace Initiative had failed to become the political tool we were looking for. During the ordeals that followed, our focus in the UN shifted to drafting a “roadmap” that would take the parties from their mayhem to a political solution. The Arab Peace Initiative was turned from a tool into a “parameter for the endgame” in that “roadmap for peace”. Ultimately, nothing came of either. As I left the Holy Land in summer 2004, I thought the Arab Peace Initiative was dead and buried with the roadmap and similar documents. Fortunately, I was proven wrong again.—*Published November 10, 2010*

We come in peace

by Amre Moussa

The turmoil in the Middle East must be brought to an end. A serious path leading to a strategic deal has to take place. In this, we should not follow delusions, yet we should seek a just settlement for all. We seek real solutions that address the core problems of our region. There will be no peace in the region unless we tackle its problems with an honest, futuristic and comprehensive approach.

It is with this spirit that the League of Arab States adopted the Arab Peace Initiative in March 2002: a comprehensive initiative that offers the basis for a fair settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict. It stipulates a full recognition of Israel by all the Arab countries, in exchange for complete withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, a just settlement for the problem of Palestinian refugees and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. This initiative is the strategic offer presented by the Arab countries to put an end to the Arab-Israel conflict.

This requires a comparable commitment on the part of the Israeli government. However, instead of a commitment to peace through an adequate response to the Arab Peace Initiative, successive Israeli governments have been trying continuously and deliberately to divert attention from the core problem—the occupation of Arab territories since 1967. Terms like “religious war”, “moderates versus extremists”—

while claiming that Israel should be regarded as a part of the so called “moderate” camp, regardless of the policies it adopts—are misleadingly used by Israeli officials to confuse the whole situation in the region. Moderates and extremists exist on both sides. Extremists are getting stronger because of the lack of a just and durable peace.

The world should not forget that the Palestinian question is about national liberation. Occupation was and remains the central problem, and ending this occupation through withdrawal is the key to reaching a settlement, establishing peace and achieving security and stability in this part of the world.

With a professed goal of reaching a peaceful settlement, we have been dragged to endless rounds of talks. The term “peace process” is now associated with a negative stigma. It has become a label for talks that lead to nowhere, while facts are being created on the ground in a way that threatens to make the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian state close to impossible. We have seen this being done time and again for the past 20 years. Proximity talks, direct negotiations or whatever we name them will hold the same negative stigma unless they are conducted with clear-cut goals, an agenda and within a timeframe. In addition, an effective mechanism for follow up, and honest leadership, are necessary to push the process forward.

Furthermore, a serious and effective engagement is required by the international community, i.e., the United Nations, to shoulder its responsibilities in addressing the situation in the Middle East. The window of opportunity will not be open for long. We cannot count on managing the conflict with an attitude of more of the same or “business as usual”. No one should imagine that the status quo can be preserved. We will either advance toward peace or move toward an uncontrollable explosion. In light of that, the time has come to consider alternatives to the usual approach, i.e., to the “peace process”. That is what we on the Arab side, as well as many other concerned parties worldwide, are currently doing.

Yes, the Arab League and its members do come in peace. We stated our position eight years ago and we are still firmly holding to it, though with growing difficulties. The Arab Peace Initiative is not a bargaining chip. There will be no derogation from its principles. It is a collective position that reflects a deep belief in and a genuine quest for peace.

There are those who criticize the Arab side for not “publicizing” the Arab Peace Initiative. I never understood or believed in the sincerity of such an argument. When 22 Arab states officially adopt at the summit level

an initiative that has been reiterated publicly for eight years, what sort of “publicity” is needed?

The Arab Peace Initiative has been welcomed by the international community and in countless forums, including the United Nations Security Council. It has been recognized among the terms of reference for peace negotiations. Moreover, prior to the Annapolis Conference, the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan were designated by the Arab Peace Initiative Committee of the Arab League to travel to Israel to officially inform its government of the initiative and urge its acceptance. Also, the Palestine Liberation Organization carried out several campaigns to reach out to the Israeli public and inform them about the Arab initiative. The PLO has published the text of the initiative in major Israeli newspapers.

We have repeatedly called on Israeli governments to meet our hand extended in peace. During these eight years, what we got from the Israeli side was a separation wall, two major wars—in Lebanon and Gaza—more settlements, and a brutal siege on Gaza.

The Arab Peace Initiative is an opportunity to create a historic shift in the region. We stand ready to turn the page of conflict and start a page of full recognition and cooperation, if Israel is also ready for the same by fully withdrawing from the occupied territories and establishing a viable Palestinian state. Yes, we need to achieve a durable peace deal in the Middle East. Israel should prove its readiness for achieving peace by fulfilling its obligations according to international law, starting with halting all settlement activities in the occupied territories of 1967, and engaging in serious and productive talks.—*Published November 10, 2010*

RESPONDING TO THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Consistent support

by Ghassan Khatib

The Arab Peace Initiative adopted at an Arab summit conference in 2002 and reiterated in another summit in 2007 has never been controversial among Palestinians in the occupied territories.

This peace initiative, which calls for a two-state solution on the borders of 1967 and a just solution for the refugee problem on the basis of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (which calls for the right of return for refugees) is generally compatible with the political solution advocated by a comfortable majority of Palestinians, especially in the period from 1993 and onwards characterized by the peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis.

This should not be seen as a seamless consensus since Palestinian public opinion has reflected differences over the possible solution of the conflict with Israel. For example, in the years when support for the peace process was at its highest, between one-third and one-fourth of Palestinians were either skeptical or opponents of the two-state solution. Sometimes this had political underpinnings, and at other times it was for ideological and religious reasons.

For the Palestinian people, the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative is not only that it fits with the vision adopted by the majority. Rather, it was seen as an effective move reflecting a united Arab position in support of ending the occupation and achieving the right of return. It unified the Arab position behind Palestinians, giving them the weight necessary to influence a solution in favor of the Palestinian position.

This unified Arab position backing Palestinians was seen by Palestinians as a strategic asset and strength that might tempt the Israelis to move forward with a solution based on the API. Palestinians used the Arab Peace Initiative as leverage and an asset to bargain with. In other words, a peace settlement based on the API would not

only offer Israel peace with Palestinians, but rather peace with the rest of the Arab world, without exception.

As a result, over the years since the initiative was born, public opinion polls among Palestinians have portrayed a steady and comfortable majority of roughly two-thirds supporting the initiative and viewing it as a good solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There was some insignificant fluctuation, but for the most part, a steady majority was consistent.

Even during the years when a plurality of the public supported Hamas and its more radical agenda, polls showed this same consistent support for the API. Indeed, Hamas itself allowed the inclusion of a paragraph supporting the Arab Peace Initiative and accepting a solution on its basis within the political platform of the national unity government formed in 2005 headed by Hamas. This government program won a vote of confidence from the Hamas-majority parliament.

Since the Arabs adopted this initiative and despite the changes within Palestinian public opinion and signs of radicalization on other issues, the Palestinian public has maintained its support for the API, which even today remains an acceptable framework for a solution were Israel to accept it and embrace it.—*Published June 1, 2011*

The iron wall

by Tamar Hermann

Since the Saudi peace initiative (later rebranded the Arab Peace Initiative) was put on the table in 2002, it is repeatedly referred to by Palestinian and Arab speakers, by international leaders and commentators and by Israeli activists and experts (mostly of the political left) as unequivocal and convincing evidence of the fundamental flaw in the Israeli mainstream's current narrative of "no partner, no chance for peace" and as a major shift in Arab regional strategy. Paradoxically, however, the API has not become a major topic in Israeli public discourse. In fact, it has turned into a phantom in the internal debate over the future of Israeli-Palestinian and Israel-Arab relations.

It is not that the Israeli Jewish public is unaware of the API; in a March 2007 Peace Index Poll following the initiative's reaffirmation in Riyadh, 62 percent of Israeli Jewish interviewees said that they had heard about it. In this survey, the public was divided over the API, with a large minority considering it promising: 45 percent of the respondents saw it as a possible basis for an agreed solution while 47 percent were of the opposite opinion.

The question, then, is why the Israeli public is turning a blind eye to this initiative. Like it or not, the API has gotten much attention elsewhere, and there are more than a few indications that Israelis are interested in peace if only for the sake of their own security and wellbeing.

Much has already been written about various Israeli governments persistently ignoring the API, suggesting that this might have had an effect on the general public's attitude. This is too easy an answer, however, because the Israeli public is far from automatic about adopting its leaders' views on peace and security issues. Another explanation has therefore to be sought. I would suggest that this act of willfully ignoring the API has to do with a cognitive "iron wall"—adopting Zeev Jabotinski's famous metaphor—standing between the Israeli-Jewish public and the Middle East as a whole. This wall is penetrated only by specific signals coming from the other side: the threatening and negative ones.

This selective hearing is rooted in the estrangement of most Israelis from life and developments on the other side of the wall. Thus, according to the June 2010 PIP survey, about three quarters of the Jewish population do not read, write or speak Arabic. Two-thirds have never visited an Arab country (Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, etc.) and 66 percent of these say that they are not interested in doing so. A sense of detachment from the region is further manifested by the overwhelming majority (84.1 percent) who state that they never watch Arab TV stations or listen to Arab radio.

These findings are probably influenced by Israel's traditional western orientation, dominant since the pre-state days. Yet it is not seen this way by most Israelis. The conflict is apparently viewed by the Israeli Jewish public as unrelated to this orientation. In the same poll, over two-thirds disagreed with the hypothetical argument that if the Zionist Jewish immigrants who came to Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century had tried to integrate into the Middle East and had maintained less strong relations with the West and with western customs, the Israel-Arab conflict might not have deteriorated to its present state.

Along the same line, the data suggests that most Israelis are not interested today in integrating into the Middle East and do not see the region and the regional players, who are perceived by and large as highly hostile, as a potential source of anything good, peace included. In the February 2007 PIP, 54 percent of the respondents maintained that the API did not imply a basic transformation in the Arabs' hostile attitude towards Israel and did not signal their authentic interest in peace. Fifty two percent responded that the Israeli government should not consider adopting the API.

This negative reading of the Arab side is strongly reflected in the answers to the following question, presented twice—in February 1995 and June 2010: “In each of the following areas—the political, the economic, and the cultural—are you interested in having Israel integrated into the Middle East or into Europe-America?” At both points in time, the Israeli Jewish public preferred by a great majority (over 66 percent) the West over the Middle East with respect to all three spheres of integration. Furthermore, over the years the pro-western bias has increased and interest in the Middle East per se has declined consistently across the political, economic and cultural dimensions.

One may assume that attitudes towards the peace process would be correlated in one way or another with regional integration preferences. We therefore cross-tabulated the Jewish public's responses to the above question with Jewish answers to the following one: “What is your position regarding the peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority?” In all three realms, both the supporters and those in opposition to peace negotiations with the Palestinians were more enthusiastic about integration into the West than into the Middle East.

In light of the above, the API as is, regardless of its concrete contents, is not going to be embraced in the foreseeable future by the Israeli public. Yet conceivably, if it is repackaged and presented to Israeli Jews as someone else's initiative—preferably, of course, as an Israeli peace initiative—the message may eventually come through.—*Published June 1, 2011*

Putting opponents of the API on the defensive

by Nizar Abdel-Kader

The repeated failures of bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and Israel and Syria may be attributed to a number of factors, including a deep-seated mistrust that has not been addressed. Israel's concerns over long-term security and domestic-political constraints have been a major obstacle to its making the required concessions to reach an agreement. Besides the contribution of these elements to the current stalemate, the one critical missing ingredient has been Israel's acceptance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which represents the collective will of the Arab states, as a comprehensive framework for peace.

The API offers the best possible means of achieving a durable peace, provided that all parties to the conflict (states and non-state actors) understand its objectives and historic implications—elusive for more than two decades.

However, opposition to the API has not been limited to the Israeli side. The Iranians and Syrians have formed a rejectionist axis that comprises Hizballah, Hamas and Palestinian factions. Iran has been very vocal in its opposition to the API and called, along with Hizballah and Hamas, on Arab summits to adopt a clear stand rejecting any kind of settlement with Israel and to come forward to support the resistance militarily and financially in its struggle to end the Israeli occupation.

Syria, in its turn, has been a strong supporter of Hizballah and Hamas and has provided a base in Damascus for the head of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Mashaal. With unrest and violence raging throughout Syria, the Hamas leadership has come to realize the importance of focusing domestically on reaching a Fateh-Hamas reconciliation deal. Reaching such a deal by turning to Egypt as a mediator represents a dramatic transformation in Hamas' political choices and indicates a willingness to join efforts to gain full membership for Palestine as a state at the United Nations in September 2011. The Palestinian move towards the United Nations is in turn an understandable response to the failure of the US peace initiative.

Time is now becoming an important factor. Key Arab states like Egypt and Syria are undergoing dramatic changes that will not only affect the political status of both countries but will greatly influence other states

and political dynamics throughout the entire region. Egypt will again be more involved in following up on regional events and will probably try to circumvent Iranian influence and check Iranian proxies such as Hizballah in Lebanon and Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

Syria has been weakened by its internal uprising. Even if the regime led by Bashar Assad succeeds in reaching a compromise with the opposition, matters would not remain the same and the viability of the Damascus/Tehran/Hizballah axis would be weakened. Such a change in the Syrian stance would reduce Iran's influence over Arab affairs in both Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

Under these new regional conditions, international efforts should be concentrated on creating favorable conditions for the resumption of the peace process on all tracks according to the Arab Peace Initiative. An Assad regime that survives the popular protests would likely have a deep interest in joining such a peace effort, in the hope of breaking Syria's isolation and guaranteeing the return of the Golan Heights. Given such a positive Syrian attitude, a Palestinian unity government formed of Fateh and Hamas would fully participate in such a peace plan. Lebanon, in its turn, would be encouraged by Syrian actions and the support of other Arab states to join the peace process.

Iran and Hizballah would thereby suffer a severe setback in their strategy of opposing any kind of negotiation to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. Given the present winds of change blowing throughout the region, it can be presumed that Hizballah would be thrown on the defensive. Although Hizballah remains a very powerful player, politically and militarily, the March 14th coalition is starting to sense the tide turning in its favor.

Syria could play a key role in reducing opposition to the API if it decides to distance itself from Iran and cease its support for Hizballah and Palestinian rejectionist factions. Such a Syrian stance would depend greatly on the American, European, and Gulf Cooperation Council states' attitude towards Assad's effort to suppress the present uprising.

To reiterate: Israel has long-term security concerns, most of which can be fully addressed in the context of the API offer of a sustainable framework for regional security that takes into consideration security constraints on a Palestinian state. In addition, other regional actors have a stake in the outcome of any peace agreement; they would like to ensure that such an agreement satisfies their territorial requirements even as it deals with Israeli security concerns.

In the end, although Iran would do anything it can to undermine Israel's security, it would feel hard-pressed to openly oppose the collective Arab and Palestinian will to strike a deal under the API. The Arab states—speaking with one voice and supported by the international community and by all Muslim states—will provide the international legitimacy needed for the API to achieve a comprehensive peace.—*Published May 19, 2011*

Stillborn

an interview with Salah Bardawil

bitterlemons-api: What is Hamas' position on the Arab Peace Initiative?

Bardawil: The Arab initiative was killed upon its birth by the Israeli occupation. [Then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon said immediately it was not worth the ink used in writing it.

The new facts Israel is creating on the ground, in addition to violating United Nations [precepts] and international law, also combat and destroy the Arab initiative. Accordingly, talk about the initiative is something from the past.

All the initiatives have proposed giving Israel recognition for free; in return, Israel has never shown any commitment towards Palestinian rights.

bitterlemons-api: What are the positive and negative aspects of the Arab Peace Initiative?

Bardawil: If it was positive then, Israel has used it to create new realities and facts on the ground, expanding settlements, and changing all of Jerusalem's landmarks, so that it [the initiative] has become negative. It was "positive" because it has uncovered the real face of Israel: that Israel is the party that isn't interested in peace.

But [the initiative was ultimately] negative because the Arabs gave the Israelis free concessions and free recognition without gaining any European or American value for it. In addition, the right of return for refugees was not made clear in the initiative.

bitterlemons-api: After the changes in the Arab world, is the Arab Peace Initiative still alive?

Bardawil: Neither before nor after the changes in the Arab countries was this initiative alive. In any case, the Arab League was planning to withdraw it. I don't think the Arab nations will accept humiliation.

bitterlemons-api: Do you think that if the Arab Peace Initiative were activated, non-state groups like Hizballah or even Hamas would actively oppose it?

Bardawil: I believe that, were the Arab initiative reactivated, Israel would once again reject it and again embarrass the Arabs, if they were to offer more concessions. It is completely unacceptable to us, but we will not be the reason for its failure. We will leave that to Israel. —
Published May 18, 2011

Resistance tooth and nail

by Heiko Wimmen

According to Hizballah, the Arab Peace Initiative is a dead horse that no amount of flogging will bring back to life. Indeed, the very idea of a negotiated peace with Israel is dismissed as an “option that cannot be promoted in the Arab and Islamic worlds anymore,” in the words of the party's habitually unsmiling spokesman Mohammed Raad. Hizballah's position may well be summed up by the famous three no's declared at the Khartoum summit of the Arab League back in the fall of 1967: no peace, no recognition, no negotiations.

Quite a few observers believe that, behind this uncompromising facade, the Shiite party is really hedging its bets. By implanting itself deep in the institutions of the Lebanese state, or so the tale goes, Hizballah is preparing for the day when, with peace imminent, its military arsenal can be traded for a better bargain for the Shiite community in Lebanon's sectarian system.

Such views may be guided by the wish to make as little as possible of the obstacles that any new peace initiative will encounter, or they may be intended to undermine the party's Arab-nationalist credentials by

exposing a not-so-hidden sectarian, if not Iranian, agenda. Either way, they are based on a serious misconception of what Hizballah is all about.

Hizballah was created through and thrives on “resistance”. During the nearly 30 years of its existence, it has converted the historical centerpiece of Shiite spirituality—oppression at the hands of unjust rulers—into a religious and moral imperative to fight the oppressors of our time: Israel, and with it the United States. This ideology of resistance is promoted throughout an extensive web of institutions ranging from schools and hospitals to state-of-the-art urban development. The sense of community thus produced has instilled a formerly dejected population with a sense of dignity and pride to be part of a larger, indeed divine, cause.

None of this can be compensated for by a few more Shiite members of parliament or other token concessions in Lebanon’s sectarian bazaar—which anyhow the other groups will be loath to grant. Renouncing resistance would remove the cornerstone of the ideological and social structures that support the party. Ultimately, it amounts to renouncing the party itself, by removing its reason to exist.

Hizballah can thus be expected to use its political leverage to prevent Lebanon from participating in any attempt to revive the Arab Peace Initiative. Most likely, Lebanese claims to seven border villages that were transferred from French Mandate Lebanon to British Mandate Palestine in 1924 will be unearthed once again. More substantially, the party will attack the unavoidable compromises on the refugee question and Jerusalem as a sellout of Palestinian and Muslim rights. And if it sees the peace initiative picking up real steam, it may even be tempted to pick a fight.

Such attempts have succeeded before. When Israel withdrew from South Lebanon in the year 2000, obscure claims to some 20 square kilometers on the slopes of Mount Hermon—the famous Shabaa farms—were concocted to create what even some loyal supporters of Hizballah conceded to be a rather flimsy pretext to deflect calls for disarmament. It worked nevertheless, in particular because the second intifada provided ample material to underscore the underlying message: occupation or not, Israel, by its very nature, remains a mortal threat to every Arab and Muslim.

To prevent similar strategies from succeeding once more, any new peace initiative will have to make bold steps and proceed quickly. To create a momentum that can overwhelm hard-line rejectionists, results on the ground are needed, as well as a determined core group of credible Arab

leaders and—in particular—credible Palestinian leaders. This is why the current moment—with the transition in Egypt and hopefully soon in Syria, and the fresh Palestinian reconciliation—may be particularly auspicious. Any return to incrementalism will give hardliners of all stripes ample opportunity to put sticks in the wheel.

Credible and tangible progress on the path to dignified peace will undermine Hizballah much more reliably than any arms embargo could. Its supporters are neither congenital anti-Semites nor rabid, death-craving religious fanatics. They are also not sheep: they follow the party because its ideology rings true with their own experience and with that of the Palestinians, who are their direct neighbors, across the border and on the margins of many Lebanese cities. Once they are convinced that the tide is turning for real, they will no longer be willing to live through yet another war for the sake of a few heaps of rubble on the other side of the fence. When this moment comes, the Party of God will have to adapt or, perhaps, it may simply disappear.—

Published May 18, 2011

American public opinion and the Middle East peace process

by John Zogby

Zogby International has been polling American opinion on the Arab-Israel dispute and the path to peace since the early 1990s. This is the one foreign policy issue that engages Americans, and policymakers would be wise to listen to the public. The overall responses point to a fundamental sense of fairness and balance and the trend lines offer more hope than the headlines suggest.

In our March 2010 poll, commissioned by the Arab American Institute, when asked whether they agreed with the proposition that “both Israelis and Palestinians are entitled to equal rights,” 84 percent of Americans agreed. And by a margin of 67 percent to 17 percent, Americans continued to support the notion that “there should be an independent Palestinian state.”

A plurality agreed that Palestinians should be guaranteed “the right of return”. Similarly, a plurality agreed that Israeli settlements built on Palestinian land in the West Bank “should be torn down and the land returned” to the Palestinians. And on the sensitive issue of Jerusalem, Americans are evenly divided as to whether the city should be partitioned or remain under Israeli control. Further, when asked straight out, “Should the US government get tough with Israel?”—a slight plurality agreed. And when we posed whether “US support for Israel makes the US more or less respected in the world,” 44 percent responded “less respected”, as opposed to only 13 percent who felt that support for Israel made the US “more respected”.

What should the president and administration do about Israel’s settlement policies? Half said “get tough with Israel and attempt to stop the expansion,” while only 19 percent said that the US should “do nothing and allow the settlements to continue”. (The remaining 31 percent were not sure.)

Similarly, in a separate poll of American Jews and Arabs, 80 percent of those surveyed in both communities agree with the finding of the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group that “the United States will not be able to achieve goals in the Middle East unless it deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict.” In addition, 70 percent of American Jews and 82 percent of Arab-Americans voiced support for the Arab Peace Initiative as the “basis for negotiations”.

While there were some areas of bipartisan agreement, on most critical issues we have seen a deep partisan divide. This divide has serious consequences for US policy and explains in many ways why President Barack Obama’s recent speech on renewing the Middle East peace process will help his re-election efforts in 2012. In 2008, Obama won the presidency with an historic coalition of key demographic groups— young voters, African Americans, Hispanics and moderate suburbanites. These groups, all growing in numbers within the electorate, tend to favor a more balanced view of the conflict and the peace process.

Americans support Israel. But, are the interests of the two countries identical, and does its support for Israel strengthen or weaken the US? Three-quarters of voters who supported Republican candidate John McCain’s election in 2008 believe that the interests of the US and Israel are identical. Nearly as many believe that the US is strengthened by its support of Israel.

Obama voters, however, strongly disagree with both propositions, with more than one half disagreeing that the interests of the two countries are the same. Similarly, half of Obama voters believe the US is weakened by its support for Israel, with only one in five seeing the US as strengthened. Do you believe that US support for Israel strengthens the US? Overall, 45 percent said it strengthens it and 32 percent said it weakens the US. But Democrats split between 24 percent strengthens, 45 percent weakens, while 72 percent of Republicans said US support for Israel strengthens the US and only 14 percent said it weakens it. Young voters split 29 percent to 40 percent.

When asked which is more important to the US—relations with Israel, the Arabs, or both—only seven percent of Obama voters say Israel, 17 percent say the Arabs, and 68 percent say both. On the other hand, 46 percent of McCain voters say that the US relationship with Israel is most important, only three percent emphasize relations with the Arabs, while 48 percent say both.

Predictably, McCain voters saw former President George W. Bush as an honest broker (by an 84 percent-eight percent margin). Obama voters disagreed by an equally overwhelming margin. But what should President Obama do? When asked, 73 percent of those who voted for President Obama said he should “steer a middle course”, with only ten percent saying he should support Israel and six percent saying support the Palestinians. Wildly different responses came from the McCain voters, 60 percent of whom say the current president should support Israel. Only 22 percent of McCain supporters say the president should be balanced in his approach to the conflict.

Engage with Hamas? By a 67 percent-16 percent margin Obama voters said yes, while 79 percent of McCain voters say no. And should the US get tough with Israel? Eighty percent of Obama voters offered that it is time to get tough, with 73 percent of McCain voters disagreeing—including 66 percent of Democrats saying time to get tough and 74 percent of Republicans disagreeing.

On final status issues: do Palestinians have the right of return? Obama voters agreed they do by a margin of 61 percent-13 percent, while McCain voters disagreed, 21 percent-51 percent. On Jerusalem, Obama voters prefer the “divided” and “two capitals” option with McCain voters overwhelmingly supporting Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel.

Similarly, a majority of Obama voters believe Israel should be made to remove its settlements from occupied Palestinian lands, while a majority of McCain voters believe the settlements should stay.

The depth of this partisan divide is instructive on many levels. In fact, as the two parties have evolved over the past 30 years, and as the issue itself has evolved—since the Oslo agreements—the two parties have moved in different directions.

By a margin of 40 percent-34 percent, Americans say Israel's settlements in occupied territories are wrong. By a margin of 40 percent-26 percent, Americans say the president should get tough with Israel to stop settlements. And, 51 percent worry that when the US is unable to stop Israeli settlements, it weakens the stature of the US in the world.

While these numbers show both Democrats and independents in support of a tougher US stance, two observations must be made.

First, there is the presence here of a deep partisan divide, with two-thirds of Democrats opposed to Israeli policies compared to two-thirds of Republicans in support of whatever Israel does. The partisan split is not merely a function of leadership, it is also demographics. The pro-Israel bent of the Republican side is largely due to the preponderance of Christian fundamentalists in its coalition, while the Democratic side is increasingly made up of young voters (America's "First Global Citizens"), women and minorities (African Americans, Hispanics and Asians—who together form about one-third of the US electorate). They are also more inclined to consider a broader view of international issues.—*Published June 1, 2011*

The real issue is political leadership

by David Pollock

Around half of Israelis, Palestinians, and some other key Arab publics, according to various opinion polls taken in the past decade, support something like the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, whose basic concept is peace and Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for Israel's full withdrawal from the territories it captured in the 1967 war. Similarly, around half of each one of these publics would also support other analogous proposals focused more narrowly on "land for peace" in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, such as the unofficial Palestinian-Israeli Geneva initiative of 2003 or the Clinton parameters of December 2000.

Given such statistics, is this glass half empty or half full? These results suggest that political leadership could move these societies toward peace based on mutual compromises. But whether such political leadership can be found, whether the devilish details of a peace agreement can be successfully negotiated, and whether any such agreement could withstand the shifting winds of public opinion—all these are different questions entirely.

For now, more specifically and potentially significantly, at least a narrow majority of West Bank/Gaza Palestinians supports such compromise proposals—even when the questions are worded to include some territorial swaps beyond the 1967 lines and to exclude an unlimited “right of return” for Palestinian refugees. And Israelis tend to support such proposals even when worded to provide for sharing Jerusalem and to omit any mention of recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state.”

At the same time, Palestinians are somewhat more likely, and Israelis somewhat less likely, to support the Arab Peace Initiative as compared to the other proposals mentioned above—almost certainly because of the former’s inclusion of an ambiguous reference to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 on the “right of return”. For a significant number of Israelis, this issue seems to outweigh even the prospect of recognition by the entire league of Arab states. And for a significant number of Palestinians, this issue seems to expand their willingness to accept peace with Israel—although, as just noted, a majority has usually been prepared to accept that even without provision for refugee movement into that country’s pre-1967 territory.

The most recent polls from Egypt and Jordan, however, show that the publics in those two countries—the only Arab ones officially at peace with Israel, after Israel ceded them all the land they claimed—are actually, and unfortunately, turning against those very peace treaties. A reliable Pechter Middle East Polls survey in Jordan in April/May 2011 shows something over half of that public opposed to peace with Israel. The latest Pechter Poll of Egypt, conducted during the revolution there in early February, showed this public roughly evenly divided on this matter, but with around a third responding “don’t know” or refusing to answer the question. But since then, two other polls suggest that Egyptians are moving into the opposing column. The Pew Poll, taken in April, records 54 percent saying their country should cancel its peace treaty with Israel.

Of course, a great deal depends upon the precise timing, wording, and sample selection of each one of these (or any other) surveys. That is all the more reason why polls asking not about the Arab Peace Initiative

specifically, but about other loosely similar proposals, can only be a rough guide to public opinion on these issues. And even polls that ask explicitly about the API must be taken with the proverbial grain (or more) of salt, depending upon their individual context, technical specifications, and the overall credibility of the pollster. Nevertheless, the very brief additional selection of relevant results presented below may be useful.

The Geneva initiative, when taken as a whole document, has recently garnered a narrow majority or at least plurality of Israeli and Palestinian support. In March 2010, the International Peace Institute reported that 56 percent of Israelis support the Geneva initiative, with about half of the Palestinian population supporting it. The group's poll from December 2008 had shown similar results, with a 51 percent support rating among Israelis, but about 41 percent among Palestinians. Palestinian support, measured in November 2010, increased to 67.6 percent when respondents were asked specifically about the clause concerning Israeli withdrawal from East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, with no more than three percent land swaps.

The Brookings Institute has reported on opinions about the concept of land-for-peace in six Arab states: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates. In 2010, 56 percent of those polled said that they would be prepared for comprehensive peace with Israel if it pulled out of the 1967 territories, but that they do not believe Israel would do so. This number was the highest of the previous three years.

According to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, as of March 2011 Palestinians still displayed a relatively high level of support for the API: 54 percent supported it, but this was down from 64 percent in August of 2009. Other Palestinian polls generally show comparable levels of support for the notions of "land for peace" and a "two-state solution", though usually without specific reference to the API.

Israeli opinions on the API, measured in late 2010 by the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, were reported to be at a support level of 52 percent, a number significantly higher than previous years. Yet a Brookings survey taken at almost exactly the same time strongly suggests that such a yes/no finding is actually simplistic: while just 40 percent of Israeli respondents said that they would be ready for a comprehensive peace with the Palestinians based on the 1967 borders with slight modifications (against 30 percent clearly opposed), fully 30 percent responded that they had a view different from either of those two alternatives.

What then is the political, rather than the purely statistical, significance, of all these numbers? As noted above, political leadership is at least as important as public opinion. For the time being, both Palestinian and Israeli political leaders are adding conditions to peace, above and beyond the bare minimum that their own publics require. And elsewhere in the region, where public opinion now matters as never before, political leaders are struggling just to maintain some semblance of stability in the face of unprecedented uncertainty. As a result, even if public opinion may permit peace, it is certainly not pushing governments in that direction today.—*Published June 1, 2011*

Two-plus-two is four

by Mark Perry

We have before us the example of George Orwell, the eccentric British author of *1984*, whose real name was Eric Blair. What's interesting about Orwell (or, perhaps, simply predictable) is that he adopted his pen name to save his respectable parents the disgrace of having to admit that their son didn't work for a living, but was (oh, the humiliation)... a writer. And the irony: this same Orwell spent years toiling over a story whose theme is that it's possible to erase the past by a simple act of denial. Thus, Winston Smith (*1984*'s main character) is told in a torture chamber of the "Ministry of Love" that his belief that his country, "Oceania" was, at one time, not at war with Eastasia is a delusion: "Oceania is at war with Eastasia," he is told. "Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia."

Orwell would tell us that those who read *1984* and put it aside in relief ("thank God we don't live in a world like that"), miss the point. The past is altered continuously, even perniciously—and now (some 63 years after the book's publication) no more constantly than when it comes to the Middle East. "Mubarak is a moderate," "we have always supported democracy in Egypt" and "the Arabs aren't interested in peace" are perhaps not as insidious as "Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia," but they're damned close. The beauty of these phrases (as Winston Smith learned) is that if you utter them often enough, they actually become true. Hence, we described former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as a moderate so often that we actually came to believe it—and were taken by surprise when we discovered the Egyptian people

didn't agree. So? So now we're worried that the current revolution will deny the Egyptian people their fundamental rights. Unlike with Mubarak—who was chock full of them.

Human beings are good at this kind of thing, as it turns out, because adopting these phrases (“we have always supported democracy in Egypt”) helps us evade responsibility for the state of the world. Then too, it's easier to follow the script than to utter the truth—“Mubarak is a tyrant, but what the hell, we supported him anyway,” “we've never given a fig for democracy in Egypt” and (finally) “it's not the Arabs who aren't interested in peace, but Israel.” It's this last phrase that seems most pertinent now, when the take-it-or-leave-it 2002 Arab Peace Initiative is being discussed (again), as a possible resolution of the Arab-Israeli (and, hence, the Palestinian-Israeli) conflict.

Articles in these pages testify to the opportunity provided by the initiative—that it presents a baseline for a comprehensive agreement, that it is a fair and transparent offer that provides Israel both peace and security, that it was put forward in good faith by a respected ruler who is tired of war and has come to accept the fact of Israel's existence. But just as often the essays here touch on the initiative's obstacles: the Arab states “were never that interested” in it, they can't “deliver on it” anyway, it can't do for the Palestinians what they won't do themselves and now, alas (and in the midst of the Arab spring) the Arab world is just too unstable for anyone to take it seriously.

It's also possible, of course, that even were the API to be accepted by every Arab nation, a known and unknown set of extremist groups (we can name them, easily: Hamas, Hizballah, radical offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Brotherhood itself—or groups we haven't even heard of yet), will undermine its legitimacy, attack its authors and fight Israel to the last ditch. Which is another way of saying that, since the API holds out no hope of convincing everyone everywhere that peace is not only possible but can be put in place (and since it cannot protect every Israeli everywhere and all the time), it is simply (and finally) unworkable. Or worse: the initiative was put forward to mask the Arab world's real intent of lulling Israel into a false security, after which its antagonists can move in for the kill. It's not only not good, it's “double-plus bad”—as Orwell's “Newspeak” would have it.

But perhaps—and just perhaps—we have this backwards. Since the API was proposed, world leaders—and most particularly Israeli leaders—have questioned its legitimacy, pertinence and importance. Do the Arabs really mean it? Are the Arabs willing to implement it? What is the

true agenda of its Arab authors? So you see, the problem that Israel has with the Arab Peace Initiative is not with the word “peace” (which is what we all assume) it’s with the word “Arab”. Put another way: if the Arab Peace Initiative had been proposed by (say) the United States and was (thusly) named the American Peace Initiative, the questions asked about its legitimacy, pertinence and importance wouldn’t be asked at all. And to ask whether all Arabs everywhere (and all political currents and movements) would follow it, is to simply cloud the one, overwhelming and unspeakable truth: that for many Israelis the words “Arab” and “peace” simply don’t belong in the same sentence—while the words “America” and “Israel” and “peace” do. In our mouths, it’s the truth, in theirs, it’s a lie. —*Published May 18, 2011*

EXAMINING THE TEXT

This chapter examines the wording of the Arab Peace Initiative, one section at a time.

“To gain support for this initiative at all levels”

Everybody but Israel

by Yossi Alpher

The Arab Peace Initiative concludes with an appeal to a large and comprehensive collection of world bodies and countries to “gain support for this initiative at all levels”. The United Nations, the Security Council, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the Muslim states and the European Union are all mentioned. Each of these bodies and countries has addressed the API differently, some expressing full-fledged support, others expressing reservations.

Israel is not mentioned. This has always seemed strange to Israelis. Why does the Arab League address its appeal, which after all is about Israel, to every relevant player except Israel? There appear to be several possible answers to this query.

First and foremost, the operative portion of the API begins by requesting Israel “to reconsider its policies and declare that a just peace is its strategic option as well”. It then “further calls upon Israel to affirm” an intricate and well-known series of specific policy moves toward a two-state solution with the Palestinians and peace with Syria and Lebanon. So the formal Arab reply to the Israeli query is presumably that Israel is indeed addressed directly by the API with regard to concessions toward peace, whereas the international community is asked essentially to rally behind the API and thereby apply additional pressure on Israel to commit to it.

There is another, darker, interpretation of this dichotomy in the API, advanced primarily by skeptics on the Israeli and American political right wing. The API, they argue, was developed by the Saudi Arabian leadership as a way of improving the Saudi image, which had been

badly damaged a half-year earlier by the 9/11 attacks in which most of the perpetrators, not to mention the late Osama Bin Laden, were Saudis. This explains the perceived need to disseminate the API in quarters where damage control was seemingly necessary. According to this take on the API, it is little more than a cynical ploy.

This interpretation is belied by the history of the API both before and since late March 2002 when it was accepted by the Arab League. The concept of the API apparently began in Jordan, which was not involved in 9/11, and not initially in Saudi Arabia. Its composition and structure reflect the contributions of a wide spectrum of Arabs, not just Saudis. And it has continued to “live” long since Saudi-American relations were repaired. It was even reaffirmed by the Arab summit in 2007.

Still, Arab leaders were sufficiently bothered by the Israeli argument, seconded here and there in the western world, according to which the API should be formally presented to Israel and its adherence formally requested, to make a gesture in this direction. In July 2007, the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan were dispatched to Jerusalem to explain the initiative to Israeli leaders. The latter, however, were not impressed, if only because it was so obvious that the League had chosen to send diplomats who in any case visit Israel regularly within the framework of the three countries’ peace treaties and relations.

No attempt by the Arab League to explain the API directly to Israelis has been made since then. In 2010, the Palestinian Authority did publish the API in Hebrew in full page ads in Israel’s major daily newspapers. But even this important gesture was financed by a pro-Israeli American Jewish multi-millionaire and not by an Arab source.

Would it have made a difference if, following the March 2002 Arab summit, a delegation of Arab heads of state had invited itself to Jerusalem to present the API in the Knesset? The suggestion was made at the time, almost certainly cynically, by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Israel, we recall, was then under siege by Palestinian suicide bombers and was reoccupying Palestinian Authority land. These, to say the least, were not the best circumstances for such a gesture. On the other hand, we know how a similar gesture by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat completely turned Israeli public opinion around in late 1977: from rejection of exchanging the Sinai peninsula for peace with Egypt, to overwhelming acceptance.

Israel is certainly mistaken in not accepting the API with one or two reservations. Yet this does not exonerate the Arab world. It does not

appear to have drawn any positive lesson from Sadat's experience, and that's a pity. Nor has the Arab League's appeal to half the world to "gain support for this initiative" generated any really significant pressure on Israel from countries and institutions that it is dependent on.—*Published May 4, 2011*

The Arab states were never that interested

by Ferry Biedermann

The Arab Peace Initiative seems to have served its role merely by being promulgated; it was never meant to be actively pushed. Like many of the other clauses, the ones calling for an effort to garner support for the API appear to fulfill a form requirement rather than being meant as an actual call to action.

There are numerous reasons for this, ranging from the API's very inception and the weakness of the Arab League to Israeli intransigence and geopolitical circumstances.

Having achieved its aim of being labeled "historic" at its publication in 2002, very little else has been required of the API. The initiative, as has been remarked before, came in the aftermath of 9/11 when Arab countries and Saudi Arabia in particular needed a diplomatic face-lift.

It would have been naive to expect the Arab League, a fractious, disunited front that has no diplomatic achievements to its name whatsoever, to be able to actively promote its own initiative. It was barely able to agree on it in the first place and even had to amend it after its initial publication.

The initiative's function now is to be trotted out conveniently whenever there is a new burst of international diplomatic activity. Thus it actually weakens the need for an evolving and creative Arab approach to the conflict—it's a comfortable fallback position that lets the Arab League off the hook.

Since the initiative has been incorporated into the Obama administration's Middle East strategy, such as it is, the Arab League has been relieved of any supposed need to promote the plan. Instead it has now reduced its role to greenlighting the Palestinian Authority's positions towards

the patchwork of US-mediated virtual peace talks. Indeed, when US President Barack Obama asked the Arab countries to make “goodwill” gestures towards Israel in the context of his mediation attempts, he was brusquely referred to the initiative and its conditions.

But actively promoting the initiative was never in the cards. This goes to the heart of problems with the Arab stance in general towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There has never been active support for the peace process, save from those countries that have a peace treaty with Israel. On the contrary, whenever there was a peace process it has been generally opposed overtly or covertly by most Arab countries.

The lack of clear Arab support, let alone prodding, especially from such a crucial western ally as Saudi Arabia, was generally considered to be one of the reasons behind the failure of the 2000 Camp David talks, which in turn contributed to the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada. At the very least, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat should have had the public backing of the custodian of the two holy places.

The API appears to be intended to create the illusion that such a fiasco will not recur. But its mere existence is a far cry from an active Arab peace-oriented diplomatic strategy, which has been non-existent.

The sclerotic nature of the Arab governments and therefore of the Arab League is partly to blame for this. An uncompromising stance usually is the safe domestic fallback mode for the region’s autocratic regimes. The rulers of Egypt and Jordan gambled that they had more to win from a peace treaty but have not been able to convince their peoples of it.

The popular dislike and distrust of Israel may become more important in the wake of the “Arab spring” uprisings. This new dynamic may overtake the Arab Peace Initiative. Certainly, it is hard to see new governments pushing for the initiative at this stage when their domestic politics are so much in flux.

Sadly, none of the above matters much in the light of Israeli intransigence and Palestinian ineffectiveness. Crucial to any diplomatic movement is an Israeli display of willingness to actually engage, including a stop to settlement activity, constructive steps to ease the overall situation in Gaza and the West Bank, and a more equitable approach to its own minorities. Another condition, surely, is Palestinian unity and a government that is willing to engage with Israel on realistic terms too.

The Arab League has been let off the hook mainly by the developments on the ground. Peace initiatives, roadmaps and other constructs have withered in the climate of the past 11 years.

Hands extended in peace have not worked, maybe because they were too often limp and insincere, meant more to catch out the other side or gain some kind of advantage. The Arab Peace Initiative is now on the books, just like the parameters promoted by US President Bill Clinton and other milestones that will shape the future of the region. It is clear by now that, for it to be implemented, more robust international measures will be required.—*Published May 4, 2011*

A view from Russia

by Irina Zvyagelskaya

The Arab Peace Initiative “requests . . . to form a special committee composed of some of its concerned member states and the secretary general of the League of Arab States to pursue the necessary contacts to gain support for this initiative at all levels, particularly from the United Nations, the Security Council, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the Muslim states and the European Union”.

At the moment of its issue on March 28, 2002, the initiative did not get an adequate response from the international community. It did not pass unnoticed, but the attention it deserved was missing. Russia expressed its official support, but no practical measures were taken. One could argue that international attention was diverted at the time to the Quartet, which was officially set up in March 2002 as a joint venture of global mediators. For obvious reasons, the Arab countries had no part in it.

Later on, when the API was referred to in various UN resolutions, Russia felt quite comfortable with it. For a number of reasons, its support for the API has increased considerably since 2007.

For one, Russia has been pursuing the idea of an international conference in Moscow for several years. In the current situation, the very concept of the conference clearly needs serious improvement, and here the API can be more than useful. This was made clear by

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who stated after the meeting of the Quartet in Trieste at the end of June 2009 that the goal is to resume direct negotiations between the parties, with priority given to the Palestinian track and to the practical realization of the Arab Peace Initiative. This was the first time that practical realization of the API was mentioned within the context of an international peace conference in Moscow. Earlier, Lavrov had declared that endorsement of the API by all parties without exception would become a central part of the discussions at the conference.

A few Russian experts believe that to make such an international conference a success and ensure results, its organizers should pay more attention to the multilateral talks that proved so successful at and after the Madrid conference of 1991. The issues of security, water and economic development are of great importance to all parties involved—probably even more important now, given the turmoil in the Arab world. The international community can take advantage of the positive results reached at Madrid. Multilateral talks could be carried out simultaneously with Israeli-Palestinian talks. Their resumption would draw more attention to the API. On the other hand the API, with its emphasis on urgency and appeal for support from the Muslim countries, can help turn the wheels of the conference.

Second, Moscow has been trying to broaden its political role in the international arena. Active steps in the Middle East could contribute to this effort. Russia believes that nowadays new ideas for a peace settlement are hardly needed; all plans and maps are already on the table. The API offers its own contours for a peace settlement and for the future of the region. Once a Palestinian state is established, the Arabs would consider the Arab-Israel conflict ended and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, provide security for all the states of the region and establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.

The main question is how to implement these existing proposals and plans. In January 2011, President Dmitry Medvedev visited the West Bank and met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to hold discussions on the failed peace talks. This was part of a regional trip, but a planned visit to Israel had to be postponed due to a strike at the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

While in the West Bank and later in Jordan, Medvedev articulated official Russia's position: an independent Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. This is not a new approach, but the fact that East

Jerusalem was specifically mentioned was interpreted by observers as a message to the Israeli government. Some were ready to see in the president's statement an indirect reference to the API, which calls for the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Russia is not in a position to singlehandedly overcome existing obstacles. Nor is it ready to present a new initiative of its own—which is actually not needed. However, it is ready to work within the Quartet, to cooperate more closely with the US, EU and all interested parties, and to shoulder a bigger share of responsibility in a Middle East settlement.

Russia is ready to take advantage of its relations with Hamas, Hizballah and Iran—actors that should be associated with peace talks in a way acceptable to all parties. It is necessary to work with these actors at least part of the way. A well-known principle, “nothing is agreed upon until everything is agreed” does not look workable any longer. With the advent of the Hamas-Fateh agreement on a single transitional government, many questions concerning the procedure and eventual results of the talks might be answered. The new Palestinian government could help include Gaza. The value of Arab support in this case cannot be underestimated.

The API has been getting more important with the passage of time. Now, due to the Arab revolutionary wave, it deserves special attention on the part of the international community. While that wave creates a negative ideological-political background for searching for peace, at the same time it accentuates the urgency of a breakthrough. Time is obviously running out. The “revolutionary virus” could spread to the Palestinian community, where young and impatient forces who are dissatisfied with the lack of progress and also with their leaders might ruin whatever has been achieved during all these years. The government of Israel should be aware of this and try not to miss this last opportunity.—*Published May 4, 2011*

Pakistan: in lockstep with Saudi Arabia

by Irfan Husain

When the famous Arab Peace Initiative was announced with much fanfare in 2002 by Saudi Arabia, there was a stirring of hope. Some genuinely felt that the API's comprehensive, holistic approach to the festering Israel-Palestine conflict might succeed where so many piecemeal solutions had failed. And the fact that Saudi Arabia's King (then Crown Prince) Abdullah had put his prestige on the line meant that the proposal would receive serious attention in Washington and Tel Aviv.

Nearly a decade later, the API has joined other initiatives on the dusty shelves of archives in foreign ministries around the world. And yet, although it got little traction in Israel, it remains the only game in town.

In Pakistan, the API came shortly before President Pervez Musharraf urged a national debate over the recognition of Israel. As head of the army, he was the only leader who could publicly launch such a bold initiative. But while it triggered a storm of controversy, the proposal soon subsided in the face of a virulent anti-Americanism that has taken root in the wake of the occupation of Afghanistan, the attack on Iraq, and the drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal areas. Nevertheless, the Pakistani foreign minister did meet his Israeli counterpart in Istanbul in 2005.

From the day it was launched, the API has been a central plank in Pakistan's Middle East policy. Quite apart from the fact that it addresses all the Arab territories captured by Israel in 1967, its Saudi parentage would have assured Islamabad's wholehearted approval.

Several factors put Pakistan in lockstep with Saudi Arabia. First and foremost, as custodians of Islam's two holiest places, the Saudi royal family carries enormous prestige. Second, given Pakistan's fragile economy, it is often the grateful recipient of Saudi largesse in the form of deferred payment for oil. Finally, the two largely Sunni states have major issues with Shiite Iran.

Recently, when Saudi Arabia sent security personnel to assist Bahrain in putting down its Shiite revolt, Pakistan was one of the few Muslim countries to support the move. There are rumors in Islamabad that the country's leadership has agreed to send two Pakistani army divisions

to Saudi Arabia should the need arise for armed forces to suppress the angry Shiite population in the east of the country.

Given the closeness of these ties, it should come as no surprise that Pakistan has continued to voice its support for the API in the regular sessions on the Middle East at the United Nations. Its diplomats have consistently urged other states to adopt the Saudi plan as a starting point in their discussions on the Middle East.

This is true, to varying degrees, of most non-Arab Muslim states. Even Iran, Saudi Arabia's bitter rival for regional power and the leadership of the Muslim world, has endorsed the plan. Turkey, with its newfound confidence and clout in the region, has strongly backed the API.

One reason for this virtual unanimity is that a solution to the Middle East conflict would reduce the appeal of Muslim extremism, which is a threat felt across the Islamic world. Anything that would help stifle the rallying cry of freedom for Palestine would be welcomed from Jakarta to Rabat.

India, with a Muslim population of around 180 million, has also strongly supported the API. Speaking in Saudi Arabia on a visit last year, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh endorsed the Saudi plan, dubbing it a major contribution to the search for peace in the Middle East.

Only the extremists reject the API because they see the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land as a major factor in their recruitment drive. In a bipartisan paper written by former US secretary of state Zbigniew Brzezinski and nine other major American public servants ("A last chance for a two-state Israel-Palestine agreement"), the authors write: "Although a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace would not erase al-Qaeda, it would help to drain the swamp in which it and other violent and terrorist movements thrive."

But the window for the API is fast closing. With the winds of change sweeping across the Middle East, it is hard to see how the Saudi plan can stay on the table indefinitely. The shape of the new governments that emerge from the debris of old despotisms is still unclear. For Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries alike, the focus has shifted away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This state of flux makes the prospect of cutting the toughest of all Gordian knots even more difficult than it already is. Even those Muslim countries outside the vortex currently blowing across the Middle East are struggling to keep up with the pace of change.

For Israel, the strategic balance might well tilt against it in the near future. Perhaps its best bet would be a bold initiative now, rather than waiting for things to get worse in its neighborhood and beyond.—
Published May 4, 2011

“Establish normal relations with Israel”

Only then

by Faiza al-Araji

Reading through the text of the Arab Peace Initiative on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and the steps that have been proposed to be a roadmap for this initiative, I can say that it is very logical and acceptable to a wide range of Arab peoples. It sets fair conditions for resolving the problems that have been suspended since 1967, such as the Palestinian refugee right of return, giving back occupied lands to Syria and Lebanon, stopping Israeli violations of human rights against Palestinian citizens and giving them the right to establish their own independent state with the eastern part of Jerusalem as its capital.

Then I arrived at the part where it calls for the “establishment of normal relations with Israel”.

Let’s recall, what was the Israeli feedback after this initiative?

Did Israeli decision makers change their way of thinking? In 2006, we saw the war on south Lebanon, and in 2008 the war on Gaza. And Israel is still in the process of building new settlements, regardless of all the calls from Arab or western countries.

What indicator do we have that Israel has accepted the initiative and started steps on the ground towards positive actions and a new trend for fresh relations with its neighbors?

Some Arab countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, Emirates, Morocco, Tunisia and so on have already established various types of relations with Israel.

Some states have Israeli embassies with heavy security guards around them. Other Arab decision makers have entered into unannounced agreements with Israel (such as economic agreements to market Israeli products in Arab local markets).

These actions are wrong. They are individual initiatives that go against the will of the Arab peoples, who are seeking a just and comprehensive peace that will achieve stable relations in the whole Middle East, including Arab countries, Turkey and Iran.

In our countries, we still retain the impression that Israel is an aggressive member of the Middle East. It has no positive or normal or healthy relations with any country in the region, whether Arab states, Turkey or Iran. We cannot say that all are evil, and Israel is the only innocent. I believe that if the Israeli people and leaders want a normal relationship with their neighbors, they should re-evaluate their discourse and actions to recognize where the defects lie. They should try new approaches in dealing with their neighbors in order to create healthy and sustainable relations and attain a secure, stable life for all.

A stable life with healthy relations means having normal economic relations and open borders, such as we have now with Turkey. There is a strong relationship between Arab countries and Turkey in commerce, economic relations, politics, and cultural exchange.

Iran is a little more complicated. We, as Arab peoples, have no problems with Iranians. We respect their rich culture and history, but unfortunately, western phobia from the Islamic revolution in Iran has created pressure on Arab leaders to deal with Iran as an enemy, and consider it a threat to the stability of the region (as in the stupid war between Saddam Hussein and Iran).

I have my own personal account to articulate my point. Three years ago, I went to Cyprus to attend a conference about interfaith dialogue between different religions. I was embarrassed, however, when a lady from Israel came to shake my hand and talk about her small women's organization, and the programs they are implementing to empower poor women in their communities. I really respected her organization and the great efforts they are taking to reduce poverty and improve the lives of vulnerable women. At the same time, I felt that I could not establish a normal relationship with this lady. There is a legacy of bloodshed and oppression between her country and my brothers and sisters in Palestine; how can I ignore their suffering and sacrifices?

When Israel is ready to change its aggressive actions and start new policies and actions towards the Palestinian people, I feel that we can all build normal relationships with Israel and its people. We can visit each other, we can respect each other's culture and we can learn from each other. In that context, there will be no more misunderstanding and no more prejudice.

Until then, I believe that we cannot speak about normal relations with Israel. —*Published March 30, 2011*

Arabs yearn to move on

by Hussein Ibish

Probably the most important clause in the Arab Peace Initiative, first adopted by the Arab League at the Beirut summit in 2002 and reaffirmed on several occasions including in 2007, is its commitment to “establish normal relations with Israel in the context of [a] comprehensive peace.” This represented the culmination of decades of evolution of Arab thinking regarding relations with Israel, and the final repudiation of the Khartoum resolution of 1967, which insisted the Arabs would have “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it”. In other words, rather than being surrounded by an Arab world that generally, if not unanimously, rejected the idea of accepting Israel as a permanent and legitimate presence in the Middle East, for almost a decade now Israel has been facing a united Arab world that has repeatedly made clear its willingness to make a permanent and normalized peace with the Jewish state.

The importance of this clause is that it affirms that at the end of negotiations with the Palestinians, Israel can expect recognition and acceptance in the region, not just from the Palestinians but from the other Arab states as well. Its endorsement by the Organization of the Islamic Conference suggests an even broader reconciliation with the larger Muslim world as well. In effect, this clause in the initiative presents Israel with a simple choice: it can continue the occupation and the illegal colonization of territories occupied in 1967, or it can agree to end the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state, and acquire the peace and regional acceptance that have supposedly been its primary foreign policy goals since 1948.

For the Palestinians, this clause is an extremely important diplomatic tool in pushing for an end to the occupation, since they can point out to Israelis that the result of successful negotiations will be peace and reconciliation not only with them, but with the Arab world in general. There have been some halfhearted efforts by the Palestine Liberation Organization to promote the initiative, but limited resources and a marked disinterest on the part of Israelis have attenuated these efforts.

Israeli disinterest in the initiative has been truly extraordinary. It would seem to offer them everything they have said they wanted since the establishment of their state, yet very few leaders or opinion makers have recognized its importance and no Israeli government has ever attempted to test the seriousness of its proposal. Some Israelis are so committed to maintaining the occupation that they are genuinely uninterested in any such compromise. Others suspect it is a diplomatic ruse, but by not testing it in any serious manner, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, the Arab League could and should do more to promote the API, especially with the Israeli public.

Other Israelis are unenthusiastic because they regard peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan as strategically essential but fundamentally unsatisfactory. Israeli bitterness about the “cold peace” with those two countries fails to comprehend that the enduring coldness is the consequence of the continuation of the occupation in Palestine. Obviously, Arabs and Israelis, given their bitter history, are unlikely to become close allies even if the conflict is permanently and irrevocably ended. However, Israelis need to understand that the “cold” nature of the treaties with Egypt and Jordan stems from popular outrage about the continued occupation in Palestine. If that were resolved, as the API anticipates, the potential for widespread Arab-Israel reconciliation at the cultural and emotional level, which is otherwise impossible, will likely develop over time. Warmth is too much to ask at first, but without occupation, both peace and reconciliation become achievable.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel are likely to play a crucial role in such a reconciliation. The end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would do more than anything imaginable to normalize their status as Israeli citizens, and they are perfectly positioned to become Israel’s economic and cultural ambassadors to the Arab world. It could transform them from a beleaguered, discriminated-against minority to a crucially positioned and empowered group that can broker economic and cultural exchanges that are mutually beneficial and form the basis for a broader reconciliation.

It's become quite obvious that while almost all Arabs are still passionate about the plight of the Palestinians and committed to ending the occupation that began in 1967, most Arab states yearn to move past the pointless and exhausting conflict with Israel that began in 1948. All parties stand to gain from the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world, but, as the API makes very clear, that can only happen if the occupation is ended and a Palestinian state is established to live alongside Israel in peace and security.—*Published March 30, 2011*

The illusion of normalization

by Dan Schueftan

The Arab Peace Initiative has no chance of implementation if it doesn't undergo substantive change. In its present format, it is a diktat. Israel is required to "sign on the dotted line" of a document dictated by the Arabs and to accept a cleverly formulated commitment to the "right of return" of the descendents of the 1948 refugees into Israeli sovereign territory. It is obvious that a "just solution...to be agreed upon in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194", which gives every descendant of a refugee the option of "returning" to Israel, is a non-starter. If Israel accepts the Arab diktat, it is assured that the Arab states will "establish normal relations...in the context of this comprehensive peace".

Even if a formulation acceptable to Israel is found and in the unlikely event that an all-Arab consensus can be mustered around it, the normalization promise is not very significant. Israel would have little real motivation to offer concessions in areas of importance in order to obtain it. "Normal relations" with the Arab states do not offer much. Syria had "normal relations" with Jordan when it invaded its neighbor in 1970 and Iraq had "normal relations" with Kuwait when it occupied that country with the objective of eliminating it. Even a broader degree of "normalization", which is not offered by the API, is hardly a bargain. To paraphrase the words of the moderate Zionist leader Arthur Ruppin in 1931, what Israel needs in terms of normalization it won't get from the Arabs, and what the Arabs will be prepared to offer in this regard is not needed by Israel.

The vision of normalization was relevant in the 1980s and 1990s, when Israel (mistakenly) believed that the party preventing the Arab public

from accepting a Jewish nation state alongside Arab nation states as a desired member of the Middle East regional pluralistic mosaic was the Arab regimes, including those that had concluded peace agreements with it. Since that time, the Israeli public has become aware of the depth and disturbing characteristics of hostility toward Israel prevalent in Arab society—the public and its elites, including Arab citizens of Israel. The Israeli public has also become aware of unpleasant characteristics of Arab society that are unrelated to Israel: the fantasies current among the Arab mainstream regarding the negative role played by the United States and other western actors, concocted in a pathetic attempt to avoid responsibility for Arab distress. Israelis are more than ever aware of the deep deficit of Arab society regarding pluralism, even toward its own people, reflected, for example, in the mass flight of generations of Christians and mass slaughter by Muslims of one another in Iraq in recent years and in the Syrian city of Hama in 1982.

The euphoria of peace generated by the Sadat initiative and the Oslo agreements was followed by a rough awakening. Regarding Egypt, it was protracted and cumulative; concerning the Palestinians, it was immediate and traumatic. In the case of Egypt, the issue was disappointed expectations, whereas in the Palestinian case it was a systematic campaign of murder, the second intifada, supported by the mainstream of Palestinian society. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Israeli public was turning its back on the demand for normalization.

Following some initial enthusiasm, Israelis have ceased almost entirely to visit Egypt and Jordan. The few who did come had little interest in contemporary Arab society: they went to Egypt to see pharaonic antiquities and to Jordan to see Nabatean Petra. The Israeli media sees no justification for maintaining correspondents in Cairo and Amman. The Palestinians, half an hour's drive away for most Israelis, have never interested more than a handful of "peace activists" who come to complain about Israel's sins and a few journalists who are close to this persuasion. In discussing peace with Syria, no one in Israel has recently mentioned the cliché of yearning to eat hummus in the Damascus souk.

The better mainstream Israelis know the Arabs, the less they are interested in them. For most Israelis, the relevant reality, the issues of importance and the examples they strive to emulate are in the developed West and not the Middle East. Even those Israeli Jews who arrived a generation or two ago from Arab countries do not look to their native lands for inspiration. Nor does the Arab world have much to offer Israel in terms of economic opportunity. Israel seeks to export advanced technology products to Silicon Valley rather than low-added-

value consumer goods to the Nile Valley. The Arabs can offer primarily cheap labor, but the political and social costs of their employment in Israel are prohibitive. In this regard, normalization is more a threat to Israel than an opportunity.

Many Israelis now realize that visceral Arab hatred for Israel, the incredible accusations leveled against it by the Arab world and the sick images of it portrayed in the Arab media and public debate are by and large not the outcome of a territorial or political conflict. These attitudes are not about to dissolve if and when the main aspects of the conflict are resolved. They reflect a society that has lost its self-confidence in the course of hundreds of years of failed confrontation with the modern world—that is, a product of envy and distress rather than a response to Israeli policies or deeds. Far beyond a position that might change with changing circumstances, these complaints and grievances are by now part of the Arab identity.

There is a widespread but mistaken sense in the Arab world that Israel's quest for normalization is so strong that it can be used to extort security and other concessions in return for formal but empty normalization, while giving some Arabs the twisted satisfaction of denying its substance to the Jews.

The Israeli mainstream is indeed prepared to make an historic compromise with the Palestinians and to offer far-reaching concessions in return for stable and lasting agreements with the Arab world. But what it wants in return is for the Arabs to leave Israel alone, not love it. "Normalization", be that what it may, can at most be a desirable by-product. In the unlikely event that all or part of Arab society feels the need to fill this formal diplomatic commitment with positive content—so much the better. But in the more likely event that even Arab political leaders won't keep their commitment and Arab society is unwilling—most Israelis won't be surprised and probably won't mind very much.—
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The API prize: full normalization or just normal relations

by Koby Huberman

In his op-ed of February 17, 2002, Thomas Friedman presented the breakthrough offered by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah—the formula that became the cornerstone of the Arab Peace Initiative: “Full withdrawal from all the occupied territories, in accord with UN resolutions, including Jerusalem, for full normalization of relations.” The equation was mathematically crafted: the “fullness” of withdrawal from all territories is mirrored by the “fullness” of normalization by all Arab countries.

The shift from the traditional “normal relations” phrasing was not just a linguistic breakthrough. “Full normalization” suggested a higher degree of future cooperation between Arab and Israeli governments and maybe even between the peoples. The tone definitely suggested a better horizon compared to the conventional “cold peace” associated with the “normal relations” clauses that Israel has in its peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan.

It was a logical upgrade: if Israelis have become used to cold “normal relations” with two Arab states while (and because) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not over, then once we have reached the “end of conflict” state, we should expect more. Unfortunately, a few weeks later, the revised text of the API (due to pressure from Syria and Lebanon) had no “full normalization” in it, and reverted to conditional “normal relations” to be established “in the context of this comprehensive peace”.

Yet linguistic shifts are the least of Israeli concerns. Israelis have woken up from the days of romantic and utopian expectations. They are much more interested in the security commitment offered by Syria and the Arab states (referred to in section 3-I of the API), and are by far less worried about missing “hummus in Damascus” (as hinted by Section 3-II).

But there are more questions in Israel. Those who support progress towards peace, even API-style, find it difficult to explain to “Israskeptics” why there is still no sign of “normalization” from the Arab states as an incentive to make concessions while negotiating. The position often heard from the Arab side (“normalization comes after peace, not before”) is thus automatically interpreted by Israelis as a sign of “no partner”. This is not just a matter of bargaining for some preliminary

signs of “flexibility”. It is because Israelis’ collective experience is just the opposite. In the two cases where peace agreements were signed, signs of normalization did indeed come before peace.

The other questions about “normal relations” are about timing, sequence and scenarios. The API does not offer a clear mechanism to operationalize “normal relations”.

To illustrate the point: suppose Israel and the Palestinian Authority sign a permanent status agreement before Israel even starts negotiations with Syria or Lebanon. Furthermore, assume this Israeli-Palestinian agreement is along the principles of the API and comprises typical clauses on “state of peace”, good neighborly relations, etc., along the lines of the United Nations charter. What happens then? Are Israelis and Palestinians expected to form “normal relations” or do the Palestinians need to wait until Israel and Syria sign as well? It is not clear in the API whether at that stage Arab states like Morocco, Qatar or Oman are allowed to establish diplomatic relationships with Israel or not. And even when the agreement is fully implemented, we have reached the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and every Muslim can visit Palestine and pray in al-Aqsa, will Arab countries have to hold back until an agreement is signed with Syria and Lebanon?

Yet if Syria and Israel sign first, the above scenario probably changes. Syrians are not going to allow any type of normal relations as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved (imagine the reaction in their refugee camps). Nor will other Arab states agree to normalization then: the Israeli-Syrian conflict is seen as a bilateral border and territorial dispute rather than a historic conflict between Israel and the Arab world.

There has to be a new way to reframe the “normal relations” concept. Here is a proposed scheme for thinking about it.

The basic logic in the API is that the idea of normal relations (let alone “full normalization”) becomes tangible only when the Israel-Arab conflict is over. Without compromising this principle, let’s portray another concept—“the road towards normal relations”—as follows: Let’s assume that Israel publicly declares that it accepts the API as the basis for regional peace negotiations, and declares that it is willing to enter into serious negotiations on all tracks. Isn’t it then reasonable to expect mutual and gradual steps to “oil the wheels” of the negotiation effort? For example, quiet coordination behind the scenes on medical, water and energy issues. Or, as the recent blessed Palestinian assistance to Israeli firefighters demonstrated last December, natural disasters can

unite us in a joint effort to address “abnormal situations”. Can we agree that this be the rule?

Finally, one prominent Saudi leader has presented a pretty wide perspective of how far normal relations may go: beyond the economic and diplomatic domains, towards scientific research and education. Perhaps the way forward is to focus on science and education as the first domains in which we quietly join forces in view of the common threats to the region.

The conclusion is simple. If the API is accepted by Israel as the basis for negotiations, then the march towards “normal relations” can be quietly legitimized. Since such a declaration is a tectonic shift in its own right, let’s not be pessimistic about the possible positive results and the potential emergence of small symbolic steps. That’s how “normal relations” normally start.—*Published March 30, 2011*

“Security for all the states of the region”

Middle East security from a Palestinian perspective

by Mkhaimar Abusada

The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 stipulates that the Arab countries “consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region”. This, in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in June 1967, a “just solution” to the Palestinian refugee problem based on UN Resolution 194, and the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The issue of security is considered a significant value to all states in the region, but more essential to Israel. The question is what do we mean by “security”? Who will provide security to whom? The Arab countries provide security to Israel or vice versa? Does Israel need Arab protection? Can the Arab countries guarantee the security of Israel? Who is threatening the existence and the stability of the other?

Security can be defined as a degree of protection against danger, damage, loss, and criminal activity. Security is also defined as freedom from risk, danger, or freedom from doubt, anxiety, and fear. It means confidence and safety, or the state of being secure.

The clause “provide security for all the states of the region” affirms that the Arab countries collectively will provide security for all the states of the region, but specifically to Israel. The significance of the clause emanates from Israeli propaganda that it is surrounded by radical Arabs and fanatic Muslims who wish to throw the Jews into the sea. Therefore, the Arab countries promise to provide security to Israel.

But, turning back to the Arab-Israel conflict, insecurity originates from occupation and repression that breed hate and revenge across the Middle East. The roots of violence and acts of revenge can be minimized once dignity and respect is restored to all individuals of the region. It is not my intention to repeat old mantras that the Israeli occupation of Arab land is the source of instability in the region, but it must not be neglected.

Providing security shall mean educating the people of the region in the culture of peace, forgiveness, dignity and respect for all. It also must include prohibition of incitement in school curricula, the media, and by political leaders. Ending the occupation, solving the refugee problem, and the establishment of a Palestinian state shall not be the end game, but rather acceptance of the other and normalizing relations can be the bricks of permanent security, stability, and coexistence.

It is very doubtful that the Arab states, themselves no longer immune from internal crises, can guarantee their own security. The Arab countries frequently turn to the United States and their western allies for assistance in combating violence and terrorism on their own soil. Yemen and other Gulf countries have very recently sought help from the United States to fight against al-Qaeda and its operatives, as well as the use of US intelligence to prevent terror attacks.

The Middle East is changing very rapidly around us. Old regimes that were considered very stable and immune from revolution and internal threats have collapsed. Other regimes are on their way to either adopt political reforms or vanish, just like Tunisia and Egypt.

The name of the game is change and political reform across the Middle East. Democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law are the new slogans of the Arab youth. There is no doubt that these principles will provide security and stability for all the people of the region. Occupation,

repression, and dictatorship are no longer tolerated across the region.

Security for all states of the region can be provided through education and coexistence. I doubt that stockpiling of weapons and ammunition or even nuclear weapons can guarantee the security of all states of the region. It can deter some countries or semi-state actors from threatening each other, but teaching the culture of peace can save money, time, and provide security.

The Arab Peace Initiative needs to be revised. All countries in the region need to cooperate and provide security to all states in the region. The Arab countries as well as Israel are not immune from acts of violence, therefore it must be a collective effort by the whole region. A new approach must be designed to safeguard the principles of human dignity and respect for all.—*Published March 16, 2011*

The API and the regional security deal

by Amor Boubakri

The Arab Peace Initiative promises to “provide security for all the states of the region”. These provisions are at the core of the offer made by Arab states in their initiative to Israel and represent a solemn commitment to withdraw the threat of war and the use of arms in the resolution of problems related to territorial claims in the region.

The security clause displays a serious willingness to adopt a permanent armistice that would end all hostilities between the Arabs and Israel. This is the first time that security is perceived as a mutual and peaceful requirement between these states. Previously, security had been mainly perceived as obtained by eradication of the other party; war was the strategic choice.

The security clause should bind both Arabs and Israel and could not work only one way. Each party would have to observe the same obligation toward the other party. However, the real meaning of the clause would definitely differ from one party to another.

For Arab states, the obligation to provide security means that all of them would refrain from attacking Israel in the future. This supposes

that they admit Israel has the right to a peaceful existence within the 1948 boundaries. Such provisions would be minimally a pleonasm and useless to Israel, which has not been subject to attacks from Arab states since the war of October 1973, save the episodic attacks by Saddam Hussein in January 1991. The API does not represent an innovation for Israel on this point since it reflects a well-established reality.

Indeed, the main security challenge for Israel does not come from Arab states, but from non-state military organizations and groups. These organizations are allies of some Arab states that can influence their attitudes, while not totally controlling them. As a result, it would not be easy in reality to ensure true security in the region, as long as some non-state actors do not accept the API. All wars in recent years were between Israel and these actors. These were the wars on Lebanon in 1982 and 2006 and the war on Gaza in 2008-2009. This situation means that a serious peace initiative for the region should not exclude these actors, which represent an important segment of the public. (In truth, the Arab regimes are not faithfully representing their populations and their ability to make a genuine peace and ensure its effectiveness is doubtful.)

In addition, the security clause also means that Israel would be obliged to refrain from using military force as a condition for regional security. This implies that it would withdraw its theory of preventive war used as an alibi for many attacks against Arabs.

The regional security issue in the Middle East should not be limited to Arab states since it extends also to non-Arab states like Iran. Hence, the obligation of non-attack could extend beyond these states to include Iran and Turkey, for example. A serious commitment to security requires, indeed, that Israel restrain itself from making war against countries like Iran to avoid the regional implications of such actions.

The security clause implies, also, that Israel must withdraw its nuclear weapons program. The mere existence of this program represents a threat to the security and stability of the whole region since it obliges other states to launch their own programs and encourages, in the same way, the acquisition of the most sophisticated equipment for these programs, in order to maintain the terror equilibrium.—*Published March 16, 2011*

The Arab world cannot deliver

by *Efraim Inbar*

The Arab Peace Initiative is a positive development, as it accepts the state of Israel and displays willingness to enter into peace agreements with it. Unfortunately, its “take it or leave it” approach prevents Israel from engaging the Arab League in any sort of meaningful dialogue.

The Arab League’s offer to “provide security for all states of the region” in return for Israel meeting API conditions highlights the problematic nature of the API. The attempt to ease Israel’s legitimate security concerns indicates a misunderstanding of Israel’s psyche and approach to national security problems. Moreover, this API clause is disconnected from regional realities, particularly in light of recent Middle East developments.

Israel has always emphasized self-reliance as part of its national security doctrine. Such a “go it alone” orientation is rooted in the Jewish historic experience of living in a hostile world. In the early years of the state, Israel faced diplomatic woes as well as difficulties securing a reliable supplier of adequate arms. Here, self-reliance led to the establishment of a large military industry, capable of producing an array of weapon systems, and to the development of nuclear capabilities.

Despite Israel’s preference to be part of the western security architecture in its region, Israel has never formally been an integral part of any alliance since before the Cold War. After a short period of seeking security guarantees from the West and dashed hopes of belonging to NATO in the 1950s, Israel realized that only self-reliance could provide the freedom of action needed in its rough neighborhood. Israelis do not trust outsiders when it comes to the national security of their state; security guarantees have little appeal.

Israel insists instead on “defensible borders”, topographical lines that enhance its ability to defend against potential aggressors. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 lent international legitimacy to this demand for defensible borders. Israel rejects, however, the Arab interpretation of “defensible borders”, which is that any border recognized by Arab states becomes defensible because it is not disputed. While Israel understands the political importance of a peace agreement, it is fully aware that since an agreement might be violated in the future as national interests

change. It still needs a defensible line to parry a potential invasion.

An offer by the Arab League to station peacekeeping forces along the borders of a future Palestinian state with Israel is not very enticing. Israel's experience with such international forces is negative. The Arab-Israel arena has witnessed the failure of peacekeeping forces a number of times. The UN forces placed on the Egyptian border did not fulfill their role in 1967; they were evacuated upon Egyptian demand, with Israel's opinion ignored. UNIFIL forces in southern Lebanon have also been unsuccessful in providing an efficient buffer; at times they have even cooperated with Israel's enemies. America's record at peacekeeping in the Middle East is not any better. After facing terrorist attacks and suffering casualties, US troops withdrew within a short time from Lebanon and Somalia.

Arab military contingents are even less likely to be trustworthy peacekeepers, as they do not have a good track record. The Arab League force in Lebanon, stationed there in 1976, was unsuccessful in preventing the renewal of civil war. Arab League attempts at ending the chaos in Somalia and the genocide in Darfur also failed miserably. The Israeli-Palestinian joint patrols established in the framework of the Oslo agreements ended with the Palestinians shooting at their Israeli patrol colleagues, which undermined Israeli trust in Arab partners. It is highly unlikely that military units under Arab League tutelage can successfully police Gaza and prevent terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israeli civilians. Thus, the Arab League has little credibility when it promises security to Israel.

Moreover, the Arab state system is increasingly under pressure from domestic grievances and the ascendance of Islamic radical elements. The recent turmoil in the Arab world, from Morocco to Bahrain, accentuates the frailty of these governments. With great uncertainty looming in the domestic sphere of these countries as well as in their foreign policy conduct, even sincere promises to Israel can be easily violated if and when a new regime takes over.

Even states at peace with Israel may be unable to implement their commitments. For example, Egypt has difficulty imposing its sovereignty in the Sinai Peninsula. The gradual erosion of Egyptian control in Sinai has led to a flow of smuggled arms to Hamas in Gaza, endangering Israel. Recently, Bedouin in Sinai attacked Egyptian police stations there. Sinai—a territory turned over to Egypt by Israel in the context of the 1979 peace treaty—could become a haven for Islamist terrorists.

The promise of the API to provide security to Israel communicates good intentions. Yet Israel needs more than that. When Arab states slide into chaos and fail to fulfill the basic responsibilities of a sovereign government, such a promise looks very shaky.—*Published March 16, 2011*

The API promise of security is insufficient

by Shlomo Brom

The Arab Peace Initiative states that if Israel resolves the conflict with the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon according to the principles it lists, the Arab states will “consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region”. Further on, the API adds that realization of the initiative will enable “the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighborliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity.”

These two security-related statements in the API are very general. They do not specify how “security for all” will be achieved other than through the inherent security benefits granted by peaceful neighborly relations. This is a bit odd, taking into account the importance for Israel of credible security arrangements accompanying present and future peace agreements with its Arab neighbors. It reflects to a great extent a general Arab attitude that security is achieved by peace agreements in and of themselves, insofar as they change the nature of the relationship between the parties to these agreements. Thus, further demands by Israel for security arrangements are superfluous, especially when they infringe on certain attributes of Arab states’ sovereignty.

The Arab states that composed the API were nevertheless probably aware of what they usually describe as the Israeli “obsession” with security. Hence they thought they should include these few references to security in the text of the API. Still, the wording reflects their general disregard for this parameter of future agreements.

The API clearly emphasizes that security should be provided to all. This is of course a basic principle of international law and is welcomed by Israel. Still, it evades the question of how security to all is achieved;

it avoids one of the thorniest issues that arise when Israel negotiates peace with its neighbors.

Usually, Israel-Arab peace agreements are based on the principle of territories for peace, namely Israel is giving back territory that it occupied during the war in 1967 and gets peace in return. The Israeli position is that the mere transfer of control over these territories has severe security consequences for it because of the small size of Israel's territory, the lack of strategic depth and the dominant topography of some of these areas. Hence, Israel has to be compensated through suitable security arrangements.

From the standpoint of the Arab party to the agreement, the situation is exactly the opposite. The mere withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from these territories substantially improves Israel's security situation. Therefore, security arrangements should not be equal and symmetrical on both sides for the agreement to grant them the same level of security.

There are additional implications of the analysis of security in the API for the usefulness of this document as a tool that can facilitate Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. First, the API's generality and lack of emphasis on security are not very helpful in marketing it to the Israeli side. It might be helpful if the Arab parties that wish to market the API to Israel were willing to discuss in greater detail what they mean by "security for all". What are the implications of this general proposition for the nature of security arrangements that should be included in peace agreements?

Another question that remains unanswered by the API is what the Arab states are willing to do to directly support security arrangements in future bilateral agreements with the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon. Are they willing to provide security guarantees? Of what kind? Would they participate in third-party peacekeeping forces?

Another needed clarification is what the states that are not party to bilateral agreements with Israel are willing to contribute to the realization of "security for all" that includes Israel. The answer to this question should be divided into two parts. The first one deals with possible Arab state contributions within the framework of future bilateral relations with Israel. Would Arab states be willing to establish security cooperation with Israel in areas such as fighting terrorism, preventing transfer of weapons to non-state actors, and missile defense?

The second aspect is regional. Here the question is what these states are willing to do multilaterally. Are they willing to establish a new multilateral

security regime? What would be its nature? It could be collective, in which the regional parties agree to define common threats and commit themselves to cooperate in fighting these threats, or cooperative, in which the parties agree on mechanisms that will deal peacefully with security conflicts among them. It could also be a combination of both. This could provide multilateral tools for dealing with essential security issues. Multilateral cooperation on terrorism, weapons transfers and missile defense can be more effective than mere bilateral cooperation.

In conclusion, the meager reference to security in the Arab Peace Initiative does not provide us with sufficient tools to facilitate bilateral agreements. It leaves us with a long list of unanswered questions.—
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“End of conflict and peace agreement”

Not a clear enough incentive

by Yossi Alpher

According to the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and 2007, once Israel has made peace with all its neighbors in accordance with a specific list of conditions (1967 borders, a just and agreed solution to the refugee issue, the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem), “the Arab countries... consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel.” This, together with “security for all the states of the region” (an important issue that warrants a separate discussion), is the Arab “payoff” to Israel in return for peace.

How substantive and serious is the API's offer of an end to the conflict and a comprehensive Arab-Israel peace? Undoubtedly, it is without precedent in the annals of the Arab-Israel conflict. It should have been (and still could be) greeted far more warmly by Israel. Nevertheless, from the Israeli standpoint there are also many questions to discuss here.

First and perhaps most important, do all the Arab countries enter into a peace agreement with Israel? Is this a collective agreement with the Arab League? Or is Israel simply invited to make peace with each and every Arab League member on its own? What happens if, say,

Lebanon and Libya refuse to make peace with Israel—the former because Hizballah with its extreme Islamist ideology holds sway over the government and the latter because Moammar Gaddafi, assuming he's still in power—and if not, someone like him in an Arab country—holds out for a bi-national “Isratine”.

Obviously, for Israel, Lebanon is the bigger problem. Let's assume Israel has carried out its part of the API's Lebanon bargain and has withdrawn from “the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon” by turning them over to Syria, to Lebanon or to the United Nations, yet Lebanon refuses either to consider the conflict ended or to sign a peace treaty. Given Hizballah's preeminence in Lebanon today and Iran's influence over that movement, this is a realistic, even likely, scenario. Will the Arab League, in accordance with the commitment embodied in the API, somehow enforce the peace and end-of-conflict provision regarding Lebanon? Will it, by the same token, compel Hamas in the Gaza Strip to comply with an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty?

A second set of issues involves the possibility of implementing the peace provision of the API in stages. Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit made this offer a few years ago when he visited Israel to “present” the API. Suppose Israel makes peace with Syria and fulfills the API territorial requirement (1967 lines) on that front to the satisfaction of Damascus, yet has not yet found a way to end the Palestinian conflict. Or, vice versa, Israel makes peace with Palestine first, with Syria left to a later stage. After all, it's very unlikely that Israel will make peace simultaneously on all fronts, and it will reasonably seek recognition from the Arab world for a specific stage of peace and explain that this could serve as an important incentive to the Israeli public to proceed with further territorial concessions.

Peace in stages presumably means either that all Arab countries will respond by offering Israel some significant element of peace, with the remaining elements withheld (pending completion of all peace agreements with all neighbors), or that some Arab countries (besides Syria or Palestine) will respond by offering full peace agreements. The API says nothing about this; it would be very useful for any peace-minded Israeli government to be able to cite the prospective Arab payoff for the next peace agreement as a way of reassuring the Israeli public that the concessions and risks entailed are worthwhile.

Finally, there is another very specific Israeli approach to peace that is relevant here. If we go back two or three decades, when Israel made peace with Egypt and Jordan and was negotiating seriously with Syria,

Israelis by and large viewed peace with our neighbors as implying not only “end of conflict” but also normalization and even acceptance into the region. We would be greeted in the market places of Cairo and Damascus as members in equal standing of the Middle East community. But years of cold peace have taught us that this is not the reality: the end of conflict is there, but not the rest.

Of course, we ourselves are partly to blame for the cold peace, but only partly. Many Israelis honestly believe, after assessing the wages of peace, that by and large our neighbors will not, in the foreseeable future, come to terms with the equal standing of a Jewish state in the midst of an Arab and primarily Muslim world. The revolutionary changes currently rocking the Arab world and the possibility that in neighboring countries like Egypt and Jordan they will bring to the fore political actors who oppose even a cold peace with Israel give additional pause to skeptical Israelis.

This explains, at least in part, why the API’s offer of an end-of-conflict and peace agreement with Israel in return for withdrawal to the 1967 lines has not generated the kind of enthusiasm in Israel that might qualify the offer as a tempting incentive. Here again, and having acknowledged Israel’s need to be more forthcoming toward the API, the Arab side could do better—if and when the revolution on the Arab street comes to an end.—*Published March 2, 2011*

The magic Arab clause

by Adil Awadh

While the ongoing Arab revolutions promise more unrest and uncertainty in the Middle East, Israel still has one card in its hand that it has not played. In fact, it’s an Arab clause written on a nine-year-old paper that could stand as an admission ticket for Tel Aviv to be part of yet another revolution that would reshape the whole region.

“The Arab countries...consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel...” affirmed 25 Arab countries that signed the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. The number of countries then surged to 57 when the initiative was later endorsed by the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This clause, along with its other offerings, is still sitting on the deserted negotiating table of the Arabs and the Israelis. It has not been undermined by the ouster of Egypt's president Hosni Mubarak, one of the most ardent proponents of the initiative. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces has affirmed that Egypt will continue to uphold the treaties and international obligations it agreed upon.

Initially written off by Israel as a “nonstarter”, the initiative has since garnered more US and international recognition. It's a “groundbreaking initiative [that] provided a far-sighted vision for comprehensive regional peace,” stated Hillary Clinton, US secretary of state, in September 23, 2010. Even Israel has shown, within the last few years, some tendency to revisit its initial position towards the initiative. In 2008, Maj. Gen. (res.) Giora Eiland, a former national security adviser, acknowledged that Israel should have considered saying “yes, but” rather than “no”.

With the volcano still raging and the thick ice melting in the Middle East, a new sense of urgency has arisen, encouraging both parties to snatch the opportunity to build the long-lasting peace that this magic Arab clause promises.

That said, everyone agrees that all existing initiatives do not furnish a magic solution. This is also true with the Arab Peace Initiative, which only provides general principles for ending the 60-year-old conflict. But, if accepted by Israel, a new reality could emerge in the Middle East. A wide door could open up for Israel to be one of the players and have a chance to join a new region full of milk and honey for all—peace, freedom and democracy.

This rosy scenario could be produced once 57 Arab and Muslim countries announce the “conflict ended” so all parties would be prohibited from introducing further claims. This is crucial, as some Muslim countries and major Palestinian players may choose to play the spoiler role and refrain from entering into the comprehensive agreement. Iran denied in 2007 that it had accepted the initiative, although the Saudi foreign minister had announced Iran's acceptance. “No Arab is going to come and say ‘we are going to claim part of pre-1967 Israel’ once a two-state solution is implemented and an end is brought to the occupation,” said Marwan Muashar, former Jordanian deputy prime minister.

The clause also stipulates that Arab countries should “enter into a peace agreement with Israel” as part of a comprehensive deal. It's a collective commitment that offers Israel “full, normal economic and political ties with the Arab and Muslim world in exchange for a peaceful

end to the 60-year-old conflict”, as stated by the Palestine Liberation Organization’s Negotiations Affairs Department.

Although the initiative does not spell out the specifics or details of implementation, some suggest that this would be a collective peace agreement that all Arab and Muslim countries have to abide by. The initiative has acknowledged gaps that require more work. A set of conclusions by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 2008 stated that the initiative “lacks a step-by-step or even a schematic plan for how to get to the desired end-state of ‘land for peace’“. The report, prepared with contributions by well-known US, Israeli, and Arab pundits, further advised Israel and Arab countries to issue more declarations to foster more trust on each side. Among these would be for Arab countries to announce, as part of the peace accord, that they recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and for Israel to issue a moratorium on settlements.

The initiative, according to NAD, “is not a take it-or-leave-it proposition, but rather a basis for all sides to reach a negotiated settlement”. It offers Israel full normalization with Arab and Muslim states, an end to Israeli economic isolation by opening regional markets to Israeli products and the strengthening of tourism in Israel and neighboring states.

The magic clause ends with another offering by Arab and Muslim states: to “provide security for all the states of the region”, a rare commodity these days.—*Published March 3, 2011*

Ending the conflict

by Laila el-Haddad

Conventional discourse surrounding the Arab-Israel conflict, if one may even refer to it as a “conflict”, talks about a resolution based on the premise of two states as though it were just within our reach. As though any resolution—no matter the final shape or status of such a state—is better than no state or resolution at all. The Arab Peace Initiative is no different.

First of all, we should call it as it is: not a “conflict”, but Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, accompanied with the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of

refugees and the denial of their and their descendants' right to return to their native homes, the continued incarceration of over 10,000 political prisoners, and ongoing violent colonization of Palestinian land.

To paraphrase former United States Ambassador Edward Peck, there is no “conflict” to speak of here—there is an illegal occupation. And in line with this, a “peace process” implies a state of war, which itself implies two symmetric parties at odds with one another, in need of reconciliation. Rather, there is an illegal occupation, and its resolution is simple: demand it be ended. As Frederick Douglass reminded us, “power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

The Arab states need to radically re-think the kind of “peace agreement” they endorse and will enter into in light of the tectonic changes in the Arab world, the crumbling of Pax Americana and the “repressive but stable” Arab regime, and new revelations about the collusive dealings of these regimes by way of Wikileaks and the Palestine Papers.

It is no longer sufficient to simply endorse an initiative modeled on those fruitless and failed processes of the past and present and expect this will be enough. Because even if the Arab regimes think it is, the Arab people will not.

They should not make the mistake of entering into an agreement with Israel without securing an end to the Israeli occupation first and Israeli recognition of a Palestinian state—something of which the Oslo accords make not a single mention, and that is not endorsed in the governing Likud Party's charter, which “flatly rejects” a state's establishment. They should also not be bartering away other people's enshrined rights—such as the Palestinian right of return. And they should certainly not be offering concessions without getting any in return.

If we are to take anything away from the Palestine Papers released by al-Jazeera, it is these lessons. Palestinian negotiators were all too willing to provide concessions to Israel—concessions they had no right to offer in the first place. In return for their capitulation, they received only Israeli intransigence, a further hardening of the Israeli position, increase in land theft and colonization and consistent sabotage of the process.

The lesson to be learned is that Israel was never interested in a just and lasting peace with the Palestinians, only one that would serve to further strengthen Israeli control over the land without the people, forever forestalling viable Palestinian statehood. It was former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's advisor, Dov Weisglass, who referred

to the disengagement as a process intended to achieve just that: “The disengagement is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that’s necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.”

The Arab Peace Initiative only further enforces the myth that there has been an active and ongoing peace process to start with—that Oslo and all its tributaries are ultimately leading to a just and lasting peace of equals, viable and contiguous Palestinian statehood and sovereignty, freedom, equality, and statehood.

It is time for the Arab states to think outside the two-state land-for-peace box and wake up to this reality. It is now time to begin to seriously consider endorsing a solution of one country with equal rights for all: a one-state solution. Given the realities on the ground in the West Bank—where Israel’s annexation barrier and illegal settlements and seam lines swallow nearly half of Palestinian land, Israel is determined to maintain a Jewish majority in Jerusalem and elsewhere throughout the land, no matter the cost (see: ethnic cleansing), and it intends to postpone viable Palestinian statehood indefinitely—this is the only solution that can achieve a just, feasible, and lasting peace.—*Published March 3, 2011*

If not now, then when?

by Elias Samo

The Arab Peace Initiative, unanimously approved at the 2002 Beirut Arab League summit, is divided into two operative parts. The first, paragraph 2, which represents minimum Arab demands, calls for full Israeli withdrawal and a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem its capital. The second, paragraph 3, which represents the maximum Arab offer to Israel, affirms a commitment to consider the “conflict ended and enter into a peace agreement with Israel”.

For some Israelis, the precise meaning of these two phrases, “conflict ended” and “peace agreement”, raises questions. Delving into their meaning to answer questions raised by Israelis prior to accepting the API is putting the cart before the horse. If Israel were to accept the API this would be, by implication, a conditional acceptance. The API does not provide the modalities for implementation; they will be developed

through negotiations, at which time the questions raised by Israel regarding the meaning of the two phrases would be answered. Accepting the API does not mean an irrevocable commitment to it unless the final stage provides each side its minimum demands, including satisfactory answers to the questions raised.

This of course does not prevent us here and now from looking into what is meant by “peace agreement” and “conflict ended”. “Peace agreement” concerns the Palestinians and the two remaining contiguous Arab states, Syria and Lebanon, with which Israel is still in a state of war. Once Israel accepts the API, the three Arab parties will resume negotiations with Israel on separate tracks. It is understood that the three peace tracks will be negotiated and settled separately. However, one question remains unanswered: will the signing of the peace agreements be done simultaneously as a package deal, or separately at different periods as in the case of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty? Only the Arab leaders who would sign the peace agreements can answer that question.

As for “conflict ended”, the reference is to the Arab states both collectively, i.e., the Arab League, and individually. For the League, ending the conflict means revoking all anti-Israel policies adopted by it. A case in point is the Office of Economic Boycott of Israel. For the individual Arab states, “conflict ended” means recognition and normalization of relations with Israel; in fact, some of these states are anxious to see the “conflict ended” so that they can conduct business with Israel openly instead of doing it secretly. Upon the successful conclusion of negotiations between Israel and the three Arab partners and the signing of peace agreements, the Arab League and the Arab states will recognize and normalize relations with Israel.

In view of this, it remains a mystery why Israel does not accept the API. Even if, as some contend, the API is a bluff, Israel has everything to win and nothing to lose. If Israel were to accept the API, it would score a public relations victory and either call the Arab bluff—if that is what it is—or develop with Arab negotiators the modalities for implementing it. It is understood that neither side will impose its views on the other. Thus, Israeli fears about subscribing to the API due to uncertainty as to what the final stage will look like are unfounded.

To the present Israeli government, are the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan more important than peace? Perhaps so, in view of the fact that the Israeli leadership probably feels that returning something tangible to the Arabs—land—in return for agreements, i.e., ink on paper, that are signed by Arab leaders whose legitimacy

is questionable and whose reign is clouded and uncertain, is a losing bargain. If this is the case, then it is another instance of the legendary Israeli shortsightedness.

There is Palestinian desire, Arab consensus, Islamic acquiescence and international support for a comprehensive Arab-Israel peace, for which the API provides a framework. The question to Israel is, if not the Arab Peace Initiative, then what? If not now, then when?—*Published March 3, 2011*

On refugees

Solution to Palestine refugees imperative for peace

by Chris Gunness

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency was established in 1949 under a General Assembly resolution that called upon the agency to assist and support Palestine refugees pending a just and lasting resolution of their plight.

As a temporary agency, the duration of whose mandate is tied to the resolution of the Palestine refugee situation, UNRWA looks forward to the day when its services will no longer be required, allowing it to fold its operations. The arrival of that day, however, is contingent upon a real peace process that bears tangible results for Palestine refugees in line with United Nations resolutions and with international law and practice.

The Arab Peace Initiative, inclusive of its call for a just and agreed solution on refugees, has been recognized by the UN and other members of the Quartet as part of the terms of reference of the bilateral peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, for his part, has referred to the API as one of the main pillars in the search for peace. United States and European Union leaders have commented upon the opportunity served by it. Not speaking to the API but addressing the need for a complete peace, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently remarked that there should be a just and permanent solution on refugees that meets the needs of both sides.

Consistent with the UN and its partners, UNRWA recognizes that the API is an important element in the pursuit of peace. As the agency with a unique remit for Palestine refugees, UNRWA must commend, in particular, the definitive and explicit commitment on the part of Arab states and Palestinian leaders to ensure that the refugees are included in a comprehensive settlement that would see the end of conflict, and is encouraged by the international acceptance of this imperative. As an agency that has witnessed—and been impacted by—the peace process, we feel it is most urgent that Palestine refugees, including those outside of the occupied Palestinian territories, be integrated into our collective vision for a just resolution of this protracted conflict.

The responsibility to ensure a negotiated end to the conflict lies with states and other political actors. That said, UNRWA is a stakeholder in the outcomes of any peace process. The agency is obligated to advocate for the realization and protection of the human rights of Palestine refugees. Promoting these rights is closely linked to achieving a just and lasting solution for refugees. This means, among other things, that refugees must be given the opportunity to exercise free and informed choices about any future dispensation. They should be granted comprehensive and adequate international support to ensure that their choices can be exercised in a voluntary and equitable manner. In keeping with UNRWA's mandate and its focus on promoting the well-being of refugees, the agency could serve as a facilitator and advisor to refugees, the United Nations and other entities engaged in formulating and implementing a future dispensation.

The API clauses on refugees appear to reflect these factors. The clauses will no doubt be clarified by the parties as they proceed in negotiations, taking into account other relevant terms of reference and real conditions and opportunities in the region. On that note, it is important to remind that the situation of the refugees across the region remains precarious—a fact we are witnessing daily. Left unresolved, the challenges refugees face could detract from the conditions conducive to peace. UNRWA is nevertheless hopeful that these challenges can and will be met with the combined commitment of the supporters of the API, thus enhancing the prospects for a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees.—*Published December 15, 2010*

The API and the Palestinian refugees

by *Nadim N. Rouhana*

In this article, I examine the Arab Peace Initiative's views for resolving the issue of Palestinian refugees. The API was endorsed by the Arab summit in March 2002 in Beirut. It presented a plan to "enter into a peace agreement with Israel" and establish normal relations with it in the context of a comprehensive peace. The peace proposal was conditioned upon "full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967". With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the API required Israel to accept an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on Palestinian lands it occupied in 1967. It also addressed the core issue of Palestinian refugees—those who were forced out in the 1948 war from the part of Palestine on which Israel was established, and their descendents. According to UNRWA figures, the number of registered refugees was close to five million in 2008.

The API calls for the "achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194". This is a carefully coded clause that addresses both Palestinian and Israeli concerns. For Palestinians, it invokes justice, which for them entails the return of all refugees who wish to do so to their homes, towns, and cities, which are now inside Israel. It also invokes 194, which states that any refugees "wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors" should be able to do so.

At the same time, the API stipulates that the solution to the refugee problem should be "agreed upon", a phrase that is catered to the Israelis. All negotiated agreements should be agreed upon by the negotiating parties. However, by including this self-evident phrase the Arab summit sent a thick diplomatic hint of flexibility to the Israelis and expressed explicit assurances that, although the negotiations on the refugee problem should be based on 194 in order to give the agreement the appearance of legitimacy, any arrangement must also be accepted by Israel.

This clause also strikes a balance among the various contradicting Arab views, takes into account the official Palestinian views (but not necessarily the views of the Palestinian refugees themselves), and reflects deep grounding in realpolitik guided by the balance of power in the region. It is hard to envision a different clause based on a negotiated two-state solution coming from the current Arab order.

Just weeks before endorsing the API, late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat had argued in a piece published in the *New York Times* that the Palestinians “understand Israel’s demographic concerns” and that while the Palestinian right of return is guaranteed by international law and 194, it “must be implemented in a way that takes into account such concerns”. Thus, the Arab summit gave a stamp of approval to this official Palestinian view, which had already reflected the gross power asymmetries between the parties, with strong hints to Israel that the Arab official position would not challenge an agreement that reflected the asymmetry.

One can say that the Arab Peace Initiative left it up to the power asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis to reach an agreement acceptable to both sides and wrapped this position in Arab and international legitimacy. The Arab states that would have liked to see the refugees return—or more accurately, leave their host countries, such as Lebanon—went along with the clause given the delicate balance it reflected.

The Israelis, of course, already knew about the official Palestinian position and Arab flexibility on refugee issues through their own direct diplomatic channels, the United States and their various intelligence sources. Thus the position the API presented was not new to Israel. What was new and of utmost importance was that the Arab summit made its position on the issue of refugees public.

For years, Israel chose to ignore the Arab Peace Initiative. But its view on this clause became clear in its response to the roadmap for peace brokered by the Quartet (United States, European Union, Russia, and the United Nations) in April 2003. The roadmap stipulates that Israelis and Palestinians should reach “an agreed, just, fair, and realistic solution to the refugee issue”. The roadmap anchors its various stipulations in relevant UN resolutions, agreements between Israelis and Palestinians, and the Arab Peace Initiative. In May 2003, the Israeli cabinet approved the Quartet’s roadmap but attached 14 reservations, which made the approval meaningless.

The cabinet requested that in a final settlement, “declared references must be made to Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state” and that there should be “a waiver of any right of return for Palestinian refugees to the State of Israel.” The cabinet also confirmed that the Arab Peace Initiative cannot be a basis for an agreement and that all references to it must be removed.

The Arab Peace Initiative with its flexibility on the refugees issue was, by and large, acceptable to the Palestinian political class. Whether such a position is acceptable to the Palestinian people and, equally if not more important, to the refugees, has so far been untested. Israel has repeatedly closed the door to the possibility of such a test.—*Published December 15, 2010*

Rethinking Palestinian refugeehood

by Ruba Salih

In 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative offered to Israel the scenario of a comprehensive regional peace in exchange for “a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees in conformity with Resolution 194”. A further clause was aimed at reassuring the host countries’ concerns, by endorsing “the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation [*tawtin*] that conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries”.

Almost ten years later, the long-standing issue of the Palestinian refugees’ right of return, enshrined in international law since 1949, remains dramatically unresolved. The recent release of the Palestine papers has, if anything, confirmed the lack of any serious plan that would bring justice to four generations of displacement and statelessness.

For over the last 60 years, Palestinian refugees have been held hostage by two inflexible standpoints. On the one hand, Israel has adamantly refused to be considered accountable for the tragedy of the refugee crisis, the Nakba, and is only ready to accommodate (on historical Palestine) a symbolic number of first generation refugees. On the other hand, many host countries (with the exception of Jordan, where Palestinians have access to citizenship rights but are subject to more subtle forms of discrimination and exclusion) have endorsed the claim that *tawtin* (naturalization) and even “*tawtir*” (development) would constitute a de-facto assimilation of the refugee populations and, eventually, undermine their right of return.

In this context, Palestinian refugees are facing a paradoxical situation. They need to keep alive their identity and specificity as refugees (bearing the duty of representing the quintessential character of the Palestinian question), thereby normatively performing the role of the marginal

subject and living in a condition of “permanent temporariness”. At the same time, they are urged to find ways to exit their economic, political and social marginality in order to take in their hands their present and future predicaments.

With few exceptions, academic scholarship has also predominantly embraced a dichotomic understanding, where “return” is opposed to “integration”. Pragmatists consider a full implementation of the right of return utopian (e.g., the Nusseibeh-Ayalon formula, 2002), while radical ideologues like Joseph Massad see any compromise on the forms and numbers of return as an attempt to nullify its political dimension by reducing it to a mere humanitarian question.

I would like to suggest that these polarized debates ignore not only refugees’ realities on the ground, but also, and more importantly, their diverse and creative strategies for reconciling “return” with “integration”. Whoever has conducted research among refugees in recent times cannot but clearly sense how refugees are increasingly partaking simultaneously in two identities and discourses, that of return (“*haq al-awda*”), and that of participation here and now. This could be seen as a reaction to the progressive abandonment of the refugee issue by the Palestinian Authority and the marginalization of the Palestine Liberation Organization as a site for the national claims of all Palestinians.

The diversity of the various locations of displacement cannot and should not, of course, be ignored. Palestinians live under different predicaments in their countries of exile, and these are often crucial in shaping their imaginations of return. However, all refugees across gender, generation and location share the idea that return is an individual, inalienable right that cannot be negotiated or dismissed from above. This sacred principle does not, however, contrast with individual and collective strategies of economic and political survival emerging from below.

In order to keep alive and politically visible the refugee’s tragedy and “the right of return”, Palestinian refugees are urged to integrate (but not assimilate) and are producing political narratives that see “integration” and “return” as compatible and desirable. In fact, a recurrent narrative is that the more politically, economically and socially integrated Palestinian refugees are, the more they are likely to achieve the social and political capital critical to mobilize for the right of return in creative ways.

It could be said that Palestinian refugees are trying to think in terms of a post-national form of integration (not the classic top-down *tawtin*), one that should allow them to achieve rights and entitlements where

they live, but without giving up their individual right of return and their membership claims in a Palestinian nation.

On the ground, this means differentiating between *tawtin* (naturalization) from above and *tatwir* (development) and integration from below. The latter include bettering one's own living conditions and enacting survival strategies, among them self-urbanization, self-political representation, and also, more importantly, access to social, civil and even political rights in the countries where they reside.

By formulating new political strategies that reconcile integration (or citizenship) with return, Palestinian refugees may challenge both the state of denial and abandonment in which they have been left by their national representatives, but also the deeply-rooted, exclusionary nature of their host states' conceptions of citizenship.

In this sense, Palestinian refugees may become a political avant-garde, forcing us to rethink new political spaces and structures for the future Palestinian state.—*Published February 16, 2011*

Permission to return or right of return?

by Maurice Stroun

The Arab Peace Initiative of March 28, 2002, “calls upon Israel to affirm... Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.” Arab League members have consistently argued that this means Israel accepting the right of return of the 1948 refugees. Indeed, at the same Arab League summit in 2002, the day after passing the API, the participants demanded that in addition to mentioning Resolution 194, King Abdullah's initiative should also mention Arab League Resolution 14/224B, which states that Resolution 194 should be interpreted as requiring recognition of the right of return.

Yet this Arab position regarding 194 has no basis in an objective reading of the history of the conflict. In late November 1947, after the United Nations General Assembly passed UN Resolution 181 in favor of partitioning Mandatory Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, the Arab League declared this decision null and void. The Palestinian

leaders of the day refused to accept their own state in order not to give legitimacy to the Jewish state, while pointing out that Palestine as such did not exist, being merely southern Syria. This position was maintained until the creation of Fateh in 1959 by Yasser Arafat and his companions.

At first, the Arab nationalist movement in Palestine was totally helpless and had to put its fate in the hands of the Arab states. As pointed out by Abu Iyad, Arafat's deputy, "The Palestinians...were deprived of a political and military leadership that, if it had existed, could have organized their resistance."

According to data from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine, in 1948 some 720,000 Arab inhabitants left Israel before and in the midst of the war. The exodus began in December 1947, with the flight of part of the upper and middle classes from towns such as Haifa, which was to become part of Israel. More than 100,000 Arabs fled Haifa in spite of an Israeli appeal that they remain in their homes. For the Israelis, it was very important at the time to demonstrate that Jews and Arabs could live together in peace.

Some of the Palestinian refugees were indeed expelled from their land by the Israeli army during the war of 1948. However, an important proportion simply fled, encouraged by the local Arab National Committees that had asked the Arab populations of the Jewish state to leave their homes and take refuge in Arab territory so as to facilitate the action of the Arab armies. This is confirmed by, among others, both the great nationalist poet Mahmoud Darwish and Abu Iyad, as well as by the Jordanian newspaper *Filastin*, which wrote on May 19, 1949, "The Arab states encouraged the Arabs of Palestine to leave their homes temporarily so as not to hinder the advance of the Arab armies."

At the end of hostilities, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 194. It states that, "refugees wishing to return to their home and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."

After bitter discussions, the text adopted did not speak of a "right" of return for the refugees but simply of "permission" to return. In this respect Abba Eban, Israel's representative at the UN, who had suggested the term "permission" rather than the word "right" demanded by the Arab governments, wrote, in a letter to this author, "The fact that to return to the territory which is now Israeli needs permission, for anyone who is not Israeli, demonstrates that it is not a question of an inherent right of any refugee, but of a sovereign act of the State of Israel."

For more than 60 years, the Arab states parked the refugees in camps. The Arab states were hoping that by preventing a reasonable solution to the refugee problem, the world would force Israel to commit suicide by accepting the settling on its territory of millions of Palestinian Arabs who had been raised to hate Israel. The Arab leaders played on the tragedy of the refugees to make up for their inability to destroy Israel militarily.

If the children of the millions of Pakistani, Indian or German refugees from the 1940s are today citizens of the country they live in, it is because they were not exploited to compensate for the political and military failures of the states of their parents or grandparents. Moreover, about 700,000 Jews were forced to leave the Arab states in the years following 1948. Not one of them, their children or grandchildren lives today in a camp.

There is no doubt that the responsibility for the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees rests on the shoulders of the Arab leaders. Israel can deal with the relevant clause of the API with this clear knowledge.—*Published December 15, 2010*

Clarifications needed

by Itamar Rabinovich

The Arab Peace Initiative in its 2002 and 2007 incarnations has met with two categories of responses in Israel.

The Israeli Right has denounced and rejected it for several reasons. It is opposed to the notion of withdrawal to the 1967 lines, it is opposed to withdrawal from the Golan Heights that is implied thereby and it is skeptical and critical of the fashion in which the issue of the “right of return” is dealt with by the API. To Israeli skeptics, the API represents yet another, more sophisticated attempt to push Israel into a settlement that would entail an Israeli commitment for full withdrawal while keeping open the issues of the Palestinian refugees and the demand for a full “return” as well as the question of full recognition of Israel and its legitimacy.

Israeli policy-makers and analysts who do believe in Israel-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian peace take a more complex view of the API. They recognize the value of the Arab consensus endorsing the settlement

and its Israeli-Palestinian component in particular, and feel that a full reconciliation with the Arab world would help the Israeli public and political system deal with the agonizing concessions that such an agreement would entail.

But those Israelis who see the sunny side of the API cannot ignore either the problems posed by its text or the other issues and questions that it raises. In this regard, the main problem raised by the text is its open-ended approach to the refugee issue. The 2002 Beirut summit final communiqué (though not the actual summit resolution as then published) was quite explicit and disappointing in this regard. It demanded full implementation of “the right of return of the Palestinian refugees based on the resolutions of international legitimacy and international law including General Assembly Resolution 194” and rejected “any solution that includes their settlement away from their homes”.

This clearly was unacceptable to Israel and to a significant portion of the international community and was superseded in 2007 by a reaffirmation of the 2002 resolution: “The Arab League further calls upon Israel to affirm... . Achievement of a just solution to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194” and “assures the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries”.

These formulations represent significant improvements over the 2002 communiqué but they still leave important issues in need of clarification. First, in the history of the Arab-Israel conflict, “just” has been an Arab term representing the need (from an Arab perspective) to rectify the original “injustice” of 1948. It is important to clarify whether this is still a code word or merely a relic of traditional rhetoric.

Second, it is important to clarify what the reference to General Assembly Resolution 194 stands for: an elegant retreat from the traditional demand of “return” or a clever way to exit through the main door merely in order to return through the back window. Third, in the API statement that a just solution would be “agreed upon”, Israel is presumably given a veto over any idea or measure that it finds unacceptable. But what happens when Israel vetoes Palestinian or other Arab demands: a stalemate and crisis or further movement forward?

Fourth is the issue of “patriation”. Much ink has been spilled by Israeli experts who have debated in recent years whether the Arabic “tawtin” stands for patriation or for the granting of citizenship. There is a clear contradiction between the apparent waiving of the “right of return”

and the rejection of “tawtin”. If the refugees and their offspring would not return to Israel proper but would also not be settled in the Arab world, where would they end up? The final 2007 version refers more coherently to “the special circumstances” of the host countries and may be directed at the specific case of Lebanon but it could also open the way for countries like Syria and Iraq to raise objections.

So much for textual analysis, which has its own importance particularly in a region and in the context of a conflict where words and symbols are so potent. But it is equally important to look at the API as a potential tool for moving on in the peace process. The first step to be taken by Israel is to offer a serious response to the API. Whatever its flaws, the API has been a major step and it deserves a serious Israeli response.

Israel then needs to create some distance between the Arab League and the actual peace process. PLO leader Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) committed a grave mistake by bringing the Arab League back into the process after Yasser Arafat’s successful effort to guarantee the “independence of Palestinian decision-making”. The Arab supporters of a Palestinian-Israeli settlement should be kept at a safe distance from meddling in the process, but close enough to be summoned in order to endorse controversial Palestinian decisions and concessions.

Once the process begins to roll, the need would arise to turn the brief general language of the API into the concrete language of a plan of action. It would likewise be important to separate the Syrian and Palestinian components of the issue. The API includes an insistence on Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines in the Golan too. Realistically, the present Israeli government (and future ones as well) will not be able to deal simultaneously with withdrawals in the Golan and the West Bank. The diplomatic challenge would be finding a formula for keeping one party engaged while progress is made with the other.

The time would then come to probe the refugee issues. The difficulties are well known. Moderate Palestinians tell their Israeli counterparts that they are only interested in the principle of “return” and in the actual return of a small number. This is not acceptable to the mainstream of Israeli moderates. They are not interested in a “principle” that smears Israel with an “original sin”, nor are they interested in accepting even a small number of Palestinians into a country grappling with its relationship with an Arab minority of 20 percent that will soon enough amount to 25 percent.

Israel will have to be crystal clear and firm on this issue. There are ways in which Israel can demonstrate its empathy and take part in a

rehabilitation effort, but it cannot and must not accept the principle of “return” or endorse its own “original sin”. Israel successfully absorbed the Jewish communities of the Arab world. The massive refugee issues of the immediate post-WWII years, whether in Europe or in Southeast Asia, have all been resolved and practically forgotten. Now it is time to resolve the Palestinian refugee issue on a rational, practical basis. Any effort to keep it simmering or to adhere to open-ended formulae will not be acceptable.

Another issue concerns the position of Hamas and other Islamist groups. Some recent statements by Ismail Haniyyeh may indicate a change and an apparent willingness to endorse the notion of a political settlement. Closer scrutiny raises serious doubts. If a formula for moving on with the Palestinian mainstream is found, the position of Hamas and its ramifications should be checked thoroughly.

In practical terms, the following steps should be taken. Israel should coordinate its response and strategy with the United States. It should then announce that it is responding to the API and seeks to clarify some fundamental issues and questions and to turn a terse text into the potential basis for a new effort. It should insist on a practical separation of the Palestinian and Syrian tracks and on sequencing them, not as a ploy (as many in the Arab world see it) but as a practical necessity.

Such an Israeli response to the API would not be a panacea. It would not eliminate all the difficulties that have obstructed efforts to revive the peace process in recent years. But it could be a very fruitful first step.—
Published 15/12/2010

The refugee issue in the API: contradictory or complementary?

by Matti Steinberg

The Arab Peace Initiative comprises two main references to the Palestinian refugee issue that seem to be mutually contradictory. On the one hand, the API stipulates the need for “a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with United National General Assembly Resolution 194”. On the other, it

indicates “the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation [*tawtin*] which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries”.

An “agreed upon” solution that necessitates the consent of Israel locks the door to a massive return of refugees to the state of Israel, while the “rejection of patriation” in the Arab host countries leaves no other option but return. So is the latter provision a sort of escape clause that voids the earlier provision of any substance? Moreover, is there really an “either-or” dichotomy here: either return or *tawtin*?

In order to clarify the issue, we must address the origins, i.e. the text of 194 (article 11):” the refugees WISHING to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practical date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those CHOOSING not to return” (my emphasis).

The highlights of 194 are manifested in these two terms: the “wishing” and the “choosing” of the refugees themselves. It is up to the individual refugee to decide on return or compensation. For many years since 1948, this fundamental principle has been the cornerstone of the Palestinian and Arab position on the refugee problem. And herein exactly lies the main constructive innovation of the API concerning the refugee problem: the achievement of a “just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem” must be “agreed upon in accordance with...194”. In spite of the seemingly clumsy language, it is clear that the exclusive burden to decide on this issue is taken from the refugee and is subordinated to the agreement between the two parties, namely Israel and the PLO-Palestinian Authority.

This is precisely the interpretation of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department (headed until recently by Saeb Erekat): “The API ensures that through a process of negotiations, Israel’s concerns will be taken into account in deciding how the resolution [194] should be implemented. The initiative provides a framework for an ‘agreed upon’ solution to the refugee problem with all the relevant parties, including Israel”.

Furthermore, PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) attested to the API’s references to the refugee issue in his March 2009 guidelines to the Palestinian Negotiations Support Unit. According to the meeting minutes leaked recently by *al-Jazeera* and the *Guardian*, he stressed that the API phrasing of “just and agreed upon” is the cornerstone for addressing the refugee issue: “On numbers of refugees, it is illogical to ask Israel to take 5 million or indeed one million—that would mean the end of Israel. They said 5000 over 5 years. This is even less

than family reunification and is not acceptable. There also has to be compensation.”

In this interpretation, the Palestinian antagonists see eye to eye: on the first day of the API, March 29, 2002, Hamas harshly attacked it for abrogating the “sacred right of return” and denounced “the transference of the issue of the right of return to the negotiation table and the demand to implement it through mutual understanding and agreement with Israel”. Hence, in the eyes of Hamas, the expression “agreed upon”, attached to the solution of the refugee problem in the API, is tantamount to a shameful betrayal, and for this reason Hamas sanctifies the literal and original wording of 194 that exclusively empowers the refugee himself to determine his fate.

Nor is there a contradiction between the “agreed upon” clause in the API and the clause about “the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation [*tawtin*]” in the Arab host states. First, the rejection of *tawtin* does not contradict the return of refugees to the Palestinian state side by side with Israel. Second, this rejection is not categorical in the API but conditioned upon “the special situation of the Arab host states”. Therefore, in places and circumstances where there is no such contradiction, Palestinians could stay as citizens.

In fact, Abu Mazen instructed his advisors to that effect: “All refugees can get Palestinian citizenship (all 5 million) if they want to (for example, Palestinian refugees in Jordan may not want, while for refugees in Lebanon there is a need). With that, Palestinian refugees will no longer be stateless but rather foreigners.”

Thus, Abu Mazen’s understanding of *tawtin* clearly and fully complements and does not at all contradict the “agreed upon” solution. The Palestinian refugees would remain in their Arab host countries as alien residents and would be able to acquire Palestinian citizenship. In this way, the two references to the refugees in the API go hand in hand.

The most important evidence concerning the real significance of the refugee issue in the API appeared in the resolutions of the two last Arab summits (Doha, Qatar, and Sirte, Libya, March 2009 and March 2010, respectively). Muammar Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, insisted on adding the following remark to the text of the API: “[Libya] affirms its reservation to the API and other terms of reference which are not conducive to the establishment of a democratic state on all Palestine or to the return of Palestinian refugees.” Had the “*tawtin*” clause voided the meaning of the “agreed upon” clause, Libya (along with Hamas, the

Muslim Brothers, Iran, Hizballah and the global Jihad) would not have so vehemently rejected the API.

To sum it up: the two pertinent provisions in the Arab Peace Initiative concerning the refugee problem are complementary.—*Published February 16, 2011*

Divergent views from Lebanon, but one common goal

by Franklin Lamb

Lebanese opponents of civil rights for Palestinian refugees often use less objective and more crude wording to define “*tawtin*” (“settlement”) than is normally employed in civil society discussions. During last summer’s debate in parliament, which failed to enact laws that would allow the world’s oldest and largest refugee community the basic civil right to work and to own a home, the “*tawtin* or return” discussion took on strident and dark meanings, which were largely effective in frightening much of the Lebanese public from supporting even these modest humanitarian measures. Right-wing opponents of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon often define *tawtin* during public discussions as “implantation” (as in inserting a foreign malignant object or virus into Lebanon’s body politic), or “grafting,” “insertion,” “impalement,” “forced integration,” “embedding” “impregnation”, or “patriation”.

The concept’s varied meanings among a largely uninformed Lebanese public have by and large prevented a balanced consideration of the provision in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative that includes “a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194”.

The discussion in Lebanon has centered on presumed Palestinian desires to stay in Lebanon at all costs, as opposed to returning to their country Palestine. The large anti-Palestinian political community has kept the discussion focused on the API’s language: “the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation [*tawtin*] which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries.”

The concept, indeed the very word, was used in the summer of 2010 as an emotional bludgeon, embodying all manner of dire social predictions from the political parties representing the Phalange, Liberal, Lebanese Forces, and Free Patriotic Movement's leader General Michel Aoun. Virtually all opponents of Palestinian civil rights frequently claimed that *tawtin* would ruin Lebanon. This was arguably the main reason that there was a broad-based consensus in support of the parliamentary decision of August 17, 2011 to do essentially nothing to enact relief for Lebanon's quarter million Palestinian refugees.

It was a spurious argument because very few in Lebanon, and even fewer in the Palestinian community, have any desire to see *tawtin* actually implemented. One remarkable aspect of last year's *tawtin* "debate" was that, in private discussions, few politicians publicly decrying its dangers really thought *tawtin* was a realistic threat to Lebanon. Nonetheless, the chimera was used to maintain a power base in their own sect or community. These political leaders assumed that their supporters wanted no rights for Palestinians in Lebanon; *tawtin* was a useful political boogie man. This view was not only common in various Christian sects but also among many Druze and Muslims. Numerous politicians have explained in private that their supporters by and large still believe that the Palestinian refugees were the cause of Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war and many of Lebanon's current woes and want them out of Lebanon as soon as possible.

Another political factor contributing to the false depiction of *tawtin* were widely-rumored American and Israeli plans to use *tawtin* to permanently settle thousands of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and thus take pressure off of Israel to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 194's right of return mandate. These suggestions by US officials during last summer's parliamentary examination of *tawtin* and return riled segments of the Lebanese public and provided grist for right-wing elements to politically, socially and economically squeeze Palestinian refugees yet again.

Palestinian refugees' views regarding *tawtin* were unfortunately rather muted or not credited during 2010 discussions in Lebanon and parliament. Occasional statements by Palestine Liberation Organization leaders that Palestinian refugees were grateful for Lebanon's hospitality and realized that they had overstayed their welcome, but that they had every desire and determination to return to Palestine, were largely ignored.

The fears of certain elements of Lebanese society about *tawtin* are unwarranted. The oft-expressed view that Palestinians secretly

want to stay in Lebanon and abandon their right to return has been consistently refuted by Palestinian public opinion surveys, academic studies, and most compellingly by the statements of Lebanon's camp residents themselves.

According to a recent survey, fully 96 percent of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees living in 12 camps and more than 24 communities, insist on their full right of return to Palestine, eschew *tawtin*, and agree with the language of the API regarding 194.

Over the past few years, and one imagines even more since the events in Tunisia and Egypt, the demand for the full right of return has increased. The events at Tahrir Square raise hopes among Palestinians in Lebanon that return to Palestine may come sooner rather than later. Tahrir Square reinforces the view that Palestine's occupation could crumble faster than many have believed possible given the military and political power granted by the American and European governments.

Meanwhile, there exists in Lebanon near unanimity among the 18 sects and various Palestinian factions. *Tawtin* is not a desirable option. Only justice for Palestine, including the right of return as restated in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative will resolve the dilemma of *tawtin* or return for Lebanon and her Palestinian refugees.—*Published February 16, 2011*

Not at Jordan's expense

by Hassan Barari

The refugees' right of return has become a key issue in political discourse in Jordan. Neither the government nor opposition forces can afford to suggest an alternative point of view. Explicit in official statements is that Jordan has a stake in final status issues, particularly refugees, and it will accept nothing short of a "just" solution to the refugee problem.

The concept of "just" solution is incorporated in the text of the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed in March 2002. The text reads: "a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem is to be agreed upon in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194." Judging from what we know about previous negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Palestinians are

not serious when they talk about the right of return. Diverse accounts of previous negotiations show clearly that the Palestinian negotiators have given up on the right of return and instead suggest the return of a few thousand refugees.

This submission on the part of the Arabs has to do with a widely-held conviction that Israel will not accept the right of return of about four million Palestinian refugees lest this compromise the Jewish nature of the state, the *raison d'être* of Zionism. In private, many Arab officials make the case that Israel will not hesitate to pull out of any peace process if this core Zionist value is threatened. Therefore, this reasoning continues, the Arabs must be realistic and accept other options for solving the refugee problem, including "*tawtin*" or patriation. One need only read the Geneva document signed by Israeli non-officials and their Palestinian counterparts to see that the Palestinians have written off the concept of refugees' physical return to Israel proper.

Without a doubt, the Arab position as indicated in the above clause of the API is an accommodating one. It was phrased to send a clear message to Israelis that any solution that is not agreed upon by Israel will not be on the table. Put differently, the clause clearly gives Israel veto power over any solution that is not to Israel's liking.

That said, one needs to read article four of the API to understand the predicament of the Arabs. This article posits "the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation [*tawtin*] which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries." This is most relevant to Jordan and Lebanon.

On the whole, Jordanians argue that Palestinian refugees must be repatriated regardless of how this affects Israel as a state and society. Political forces view *tawtin* as an abhorrent option because it has the potential to compromise the identity of Jordan. East Bankers in particular fear *tawtin* lest this transform them into a minority in their own country. The reformist nationalist Jordanians view this identity issue as an obstacle to introducing much needed genuine political reform.

Even the Islamists are against *tawtin*. In fact, one of the reasons for their opposition to the Oslo agreements and the 1994 Wadi Araba Jordan-Israel peace agreement is the issue of refugees. Neither Islamists nor Jordanian nationalists trust the Palestine Liberation Organization to negotiate with Israel on this specific issue.

Although the government has not said anything different publicly, some former officials, including a former prime minister, say that Jordan is

for a “just” solution, one that enables the refugees to practice the right of return. Nevertheless, they insinuate that if refugees choose not to return they will be dealt with as Jordanian citizens with full rights. One may interpret this position as an acknowledgment of the impotence of the Arabs to do more. By throwing the ball into the court of refugees themselves, the state wants to pass the buck.

Some academics and politicians indicate they probably would not mind *tawtin* when they focus their arguments on displaced persons rather than refugees. Their argument is that if the displaced persons (some 900,000, who fled to Jordan in 1967 and thereafter) go back to the West Bank and Gaza, then East Bankers will be the majority and democracy would be welcome even if the refugees remain. In fact, many see the return of displaced persons as a personal decision, while the PLO rejects that notion despite its statements to the contrary.

In brief, regardless of where the regime in Jordan stands on this issue, Jordanians on the whole mistrust the PLO to handle this issue separately. Any decision on this will directly complicate the situation in Jordan, thus sowing the seeds of instability. For this reason, many politicians argue for better relations with Hamas to make it difficult for the PLO to concede and solve the problem at Jordan’s expense.—
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On borders

A package deal

by Ghassan Khatib

Like the roadmap, the Arab Peace Initiative is unique in its ability to address all of the legitimate concerns of parties to the conflict. In this way, it illustrates that the legitimate requirements of Israel are not incompatible with those of the Arabs and Palestinians.

The need to end the Israeli occupation of territory acquired in 1967 (the Gaza Strip and West Bank including East Jerusalem, as well as the Golan Heights of Syria and remaining occupied Lebanese territories) is the most important concern of the Arab side of the conflict.

Likewise, Palestinian and Arab willingness to recognize Israel within the borders of 1967 is the other side of the coin, the trade-off for Israeli willingness to end that occupation and allow for an independent Palestinian state next to Israel.

The peace and security that is required by all parties to the conflict—and that is the most prominent Israeli concern—is rooted in the culmination of the two-state solution, which will consequently allow the Palestinian party the rights of self-determination, freedom and liberty through their independent state within the borders of 1967.

The Arab Peace Initiative holds out for “full Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied since 1967”. The word “full” here is important to the Palestinian and Arab side—first, because the occupied Palestinian territory is very small and excluding parts of it from Israeli withdrawal would affect significantly its viability as an independent state.

But second and more important is the Palestinian and Arab desire to base their positions upon international legality, which cannot be compromised. Were we to compromise on international law by conceding the borders of 1967, then we would allow the negotiations over borders to fall hostage to the balance of power between the two sides, which is obviously not in our favor.

Finally, need anyone be reminded, Palestinians have rights to historic Palestine beyond the borders of 1967. Palestinians have compromised their rights to the lands beyond the 1967 borders in the hopes of gaining a state of their own. However, it is important to recall that the only other borders besides the lines of 1967 with legal significance are the lines of the 1948 partition plan encoded in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181.

What Israel needs to understand is that it cannot use the virtue of its power and military might to prevent a full withdrawal from all Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. By trying to do so, it risks scuttling the two-state solution and shouldering the blame for missing the historic compromise that the Arab Peace Initiative is calling for. In short, it risks peace in the region.

Israel usually raises three arguments against full withdrawal from the occupied territories. First is the settlement reality. However, we are forced not to take this seriously because Israel insists on expanding settlements in order to justify its control over more territory.

The second excuse is security, and the Palestinian side has been very flexible in negotiations in accepting any requested security guarantees, including an international military presence, as long as they come with a full territorial withdrawal.

Third, Israel says it cannot abandon the holy sites in Jerusalem. Here the Palestinian position is very clear and logical: political sovereignty does not follow religious or historic attachment. Followers of different faiths should and can be guaranteed the right to access and worship at holy sites no matter who is in control of the territories. Jews, Christians and Muslims should have equal and free access to their relevant religious sites, no matter if these fall in the Jewish or Palestinian state. Today, two sites revered by the Jewish people fall under Palestinian Authority control in Nablus and Jericho. These sites have been developed and respected by the Palestinian Authority and Jewish worshippers given access. Indeed, no one has complained.

The Arab Peace Initiative is a package deal and cannot be dealt with selectively. Israel, in return for a full withdrawal, is guaranteed comprehensive peace, security and economic prosperity. It must, however, withdraw to the borders of 1967.—*Published December 1, 2010*

A double standard

by Shlomo Brom

The Arab Peace Initiative offers to Israel peace, normalization and security guarantees from the entire Arab world after the conclusion of agreements on the three bilateral tracks—Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese. But it also presents the framework of agreements acceptable to the Arab world.

The clause that pertains to the territorial aspect of these peace settlements determines that the agreements should include, “Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.”

There is a clear difference in the way the API treats the Palestinian and Syrian cases and the way it treats the Lebanese case. In the two

first instances, the demand is to return to the lines of June 4, 1967. In the Lebanese case, Israel is asked to withdraw from the occupied Lebanese territories in South Lebanon without specifying when they were occupied.

This implies that the API is applying a double standard. In the Lebanese case, one can understand based on past Lebanese demands that the API is demanding that Israel withdraw to the line of the Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement of March 1949. That means that all the changes that took place since 1949 are null and void, including changes that took place between 1949 and 1967. The present dividing line between Lebanon and Israel, the so-called "blue line", is not an agreed border between the two states.

The disputes between Lebanon and Israel are of two categories: disputes that resulted from the 1967 war, and disputes about more minor changes that occurred mostly between 1949 and 1967. The Shebaa farms and Ghajar are examples of the first category, while the second category includes some points along the armistice line in which there was no agreement on the accurate delineation of the border because the two parties did not complete a process of joint border delineation that began at the beginning of the 1950s and was stopped.

In the Syrian case, the API demands a withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 line because Syria does not want to give up territory that it acquired between 1949 and 1967 through acts that violated the armistice agreement with Israel. The June 4, 1967 line is not identical to the lines of the Israel-Syria Armistice Agreement of July 1949 because Syria took control by force of important parts of the demilitarized zones that were determined by the agreement, including the al-Hama area.

It will, of course, be difficult for Israel to accept the double standard that acquisition of territory by force is legitimate when it is done by an Arab party and illegitimate when it is done by Israel.

In the Palestinian case, there is no such problem because the armistice line is identical with the 1967 line, the so-called "green line". Nevertheless, the language of the API may become an obstacle to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on a common border. If one takes the API literally, Israel should withdraw precisely to the green line. Yet in fact, the two sides have already made much progress in their border negotiations and both accept that as long as the Palestinians get the same size territory as that constituted by the West Bank and the Gaza

Strip on June 4, 1967, some equal swaps of territory are acceptable. There is still a debate over the size of the swapped territories, which the Palestinian side wishes to minimize, and their location, but there is agreement on the principle. It would be a pity if the API were to preclude this progress and interfere with the capacity of Israel and the PLO to reach a reasonable agreement.

This raises the question, how significant is this clause in the API? It is only natural that when discussing the wording of the API in March 2002, the Arab parties in the three bilateral tracks, Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese, did not want to compromise their negotiating positions and therefore chose this wording. One can also assume that the authors of this clause wanted to adopt a simple principle that is acceptable to the entire Arab world of return to the June 4, 1967 lines without complicating it with the peculiarities of each case.

The result is a compromise between these two requirements. It is a fair assumption that the Arab world will accept any reasonable peace agreement that is concluded by the parties. In this sense, the API is only significant because it reflects the positions of the direct parties. But after so many years of peace process, these positions are in any case already known and with greater detail.

The clear conclusion is that the API clause that deals with borders should not prevent Israel from stating that it can accept the API as a basis for peace negotiations and cooperation with Arab parties even if it has some reservations regarding the details of future agreements.-
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A Palestinian state within the 1967 borders: settlements vs. sovereignty

by Philip C. Wilcox

Today, few disagree that without massive withdrawals from Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where over 500,000 settlers now live, there is no hope for a two-state peace. A majority of Israelis also agree that an end to the conflict, preservation of a democratic, Jewish Israel, and freedom and statehood for Palestinians,

are impossible without a radical reversal of Israel's misbegotten settlement adventure.

Israel's 43-year national project of settling the territory occupied in 1967 was designed to create "facts on the ground" that would maintain Israeli control and thwart Palestinian self-determination. Today, even Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu says he accepts the need for a two-state peace. But continuing aggressive settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in defiance of the United States and the international community, are clear evidence that Netanyahu and his government oppose a genuine two-state agreement, and still adamantly reject a shared Jerusalem.

Most governments today believe that international law, including United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the Fourth Geneva Convention outlawing settlements, should inform an agreement on a two-state border. The roadmap, which was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1515, Quartet positions, and statements by the Obama administration, concur that the starting point for creating a two-state peace should focus on the 1967 border.

In the end, the Israeli and Palestinian people themselves must accept a border that addresses their basic needs. For Palestinians, this means freedom, sovereignty, and security in a viable, contiguous state, the end of settlements, and a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. For Israel, it means peace within "secure and recognized borders", as set forth in Resolution 242, reconciliation with the Arab states and an increasingly estranged international community, and—for most Israelis—preserving a Jewish, democratic state.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to invent a solution, given the exhaustive work by Israeli and Palestinian experts on the elements of a comprehensive peace and a territorial solution. The first effort to address the contradiction between the 1967 borders and settlements came late in the Oslo talks when negotiators began discussing a compromise between total withdrawal to the 1967 border and a redefined border through land swaps.

The swap concept was also adopted in the late 2000 "Clinton parameters" and the Geneva accord of 2003. The latter was drafted by leading Israeli and Palestinian experts, and elaborated in 2009. It proposes Israeli annexation of two percent of the West Bank and East Jerusalem adjacent to the 1967 line containing about 350,000 settlers in big bloc settlements. In return, Israel would evacuate about

150,000 other settlers and transfer to Palestine two percent of its land, of equal quality, next to the southern West Bank and Gaza. (The latter would especially appeal to land-starved Gazans, and could support reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, essential to an ultimate peace agreement.) Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has endorsed land swaps on a 1:1 basis, and the Obama administration has concurred, in general.

Israeli withdrawal of many settlements near the 1967 line and dozens of others deeper in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley, and annexations limited to large, dense settlements, such as Modiin Illit adjacent to central Israel, and in East Jerusalem, would restore a more contiguous and economically viable border interrupted only with a few enclaves attached to Israel with access roads. It would also allow a contiguous Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem that is a bottom line requirement. Another benefit would be restoration of critical farmland and water resources now controlled by settlements.

But even such a compromise, following the Geneva accord or some other plan, would demand a radical transformation of the status quo. Israeli and Palestinian leaders have long since proved that they cannot negotiate such a deal by themselves, given their crippling internal ideological and religious divisions and the unequal balance of power. Just as leadership by the US and the international community was necessary to create and sustain the new state of Israel in 1948, similar intervention and a US-led peace plan will be necessary to create a viable Palestinian state and rescue Israel from its self-destructive policies.

Israel's current leadership (which is dominated by the settler, religious and ideological right) as well as extreme Hamas elements would fiercely resist this, and detailed negotiations would still be necessary. But there is a chance that, with broad international, including Arab and UN support, and tough, determined, but empathetic US diplomacy, such a transformative US plan could galvanize majorities in Israel and Palestine to agree and oblige their leaders to make peace. This would require an unprecedented and politically-challenging change in US policy, restoring balance to the current lopsided American-Israeli alliance. But the alternative is tragic defeat for the national hopes of both Israelis and Palestinians, more instability in the region, and continued erosion of US national security.—*Published January 26, 2011*

Settlements, borders and the Israeli plan

by Khalil Toufakji

Control of the land is an important component in drawing the borders of the Hebrew state—as such the establishment of settlements is fundamental. In June 1967, Israel attacked the Arab states in a war justified for security reasons that quickly resulted in the complete occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as other lands belonging to the Arab states.

The purpose was to open a new front for Israeli settlement. Immediately and up until the 1980s, Israel planted settlements on the lands that it confiscated for “security reasons” and where the Jordanian military had created bases. Then it concentrated on legally establishing settlements as temporary posts with military value (as in the settlements of the Jordan Valley) and the Etzion bloc, thereby transforming conditions on the ground in the West Bank, including parts of Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Key to this was the law passed on June 28, 1967 that widened the borders of Jerusalem. The Likud government then further advanced these policies in the legislature, thereby controlling some 40 percent of the West Bank.

Even before the shooting stopped entirely, Israeli bulldozers were destroying Palestinian villages (like Yalo, Amwas and Beit Nuba) and part of the town of Qalqilia. Fifty-eight square kilometers were thus controlled in these no-man’s-lands, and new settlements established there. Similarly, an entire neighborhood was destroyed in the city of Jerusalem, on which was built what is now called the Jewish Quarter. It was through these policies that Israel was able to change the borders of the land in its favor (in Jerusalem, Latroun, and the Gush Etzion area), along with the security area in the Jordan Valley, concentrating its settlements in those areas.

According to the Alon plan, other areas were to be returned to Jordan but over time and with changes in the political atmosphere and the Zionist vision, these became part of the strategic settlement project. The policy of Israel became to employ the borders of the West Bank that included the largest areas of land with the fewest number of people. In addition to this, Israel sought to reach a status quo with Jordan that created a political border of 10-15 kilometers deep the length of the Jordan valley, and the Dead Sea, Gush Etzion and the Latroun area. This policy advanced with the Likud government in 1977 that lay down new lines in

the settlement project, planting settlements in the Palestinian hills that ultimately were intended to geographically destroy the prospects for a Palestinian state.

During this phase, the population of the settlements grew immensely. By the signing of the Wye River accords in 1998, the number of settlers had risen to 170,000. By 2010, the number had risen even higher to 328,000. Israeli bulldozers were turning over Palestinian ground at a faster rate for new settlements, implementing a settlement master plan. Israel took advantage of the agreements and invested in expansion, and drew new borders for the Israeli state. Barely had Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu returned from Washington when military orders confiscating more land were signed and delivered. Knesset member Benny Eilon from the Moledet party called on the settlers to grab as much land as possible from Palestinians. Ariel Sharon said, "Everybody has to move; run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements, because everything we take now will stay ours. Everything we don't grab will go to them."

This process put in place 116 settlement outposts planned by Sharon when he was housing minister in 1990. In 2001, the decision was made to build the Separation Wall, which at times cut 500-900 meters inside the Green Line, seeking to sever Palestinian areas from Israeli areas. In that way, the maps that were created in Camp David and in Taba were overridden by facts on the ground and a new border. The removal of the settlements in the Gaza Strip and the north of the West Bank sped up the process of fulfilling the map envisioned by Ariel Sharon that would strengthen Israeli control over the Israeli settlement blocs in the West Bank. Then came the creation of the police station as part of the E1 plan between the settlement of Maale Adumim and Jerusalem, as one more attempt to create facts on the ground before the start of final status talks. As Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said, "The settlement blocs in the West Bank will be in the hands of Israel and behind the wall, and this was made clear to the Americans, and that is our position, even if they have reservations."

The American letter of support of April 14, 2004 preempted final status talks, accepting the expansion of the settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem and sketching the borders of the Palestinian state according to Israel plans. Here we see that the settlements and their expansion are integral to Israel. The Jordan valley remains under Israeli security, economic, and environmental control. Thus, Israel has drawn the borders of the Palestinian state the way it desires, and not according to the 1967 borders.—*Published January 26, 2011*

The border is not the heart of the conflict

by Yisrael Harel

Most people who deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including most Israelis, believe the heart of that conflict is territorial. Accordingly, what is known as the “peace process” is stuck due to disagreement between the two sides concerning the location of the future border. Even the Arab Peace Initiative—assuming it is for real and isn’t simply a Saudi public-relations stunt that emerged, coincidentally, shortly after the 9/11 attacks in which many Saudis were involved—focuses on the question of borders. Indeed, it determines their location: “Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines”, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a “sovereign independent Palestinian state”.

Surprise, surprise: even though Israel has nearly internalized this Arab demand, this has not advanced negotiations at all. On the contrary, in the last two years, despite Israeli readiness for territorial compromises that come close to the API formula, including in Jerusalem and the Golan, the Palestinians have been boycotting the talks with Israel.

Professor Anita Shapira, a renowned historian who specializes in the history of the socialist Zionist movements, recently analyzed the events that led up to the latest split in the Labor party. She noted that in the early 1990s, when Labor was one of the two big centrist parties, a member of the party who advocated a Palestinian state was considered a virtual traitor. Today, 20 years later, even Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu has formally committed to “two states for two peoples”. And in the talks with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat in 2000 at Camp David, Ehud Barak—the man who until last week led Labor, the party that caused Yossi Sarid to abandon its ranks over the Palestinian state issue—was prepared to deliver to the Palestinians sovereignty over East Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount. Peace, it emerges, is more important to many Israelis than the holiest site of the Jewish people. Ever since, including just two weeks ago, Barak doesn’t tire of repeating this formula, while no one on the “right” demands his removal from the Likud-led “rightist” government in Jerusalem.

Thus has Israel, whose senior leaders are prepared to establish a Palestinian state and divide Jerusalem, experienced a process of revolutionary ideological erosion. Yet, rather than causing Palestinian

leaders to heighten their contacts with Israel in order to reach agreement, this erosion has distanced them. Their absence from negotiations over the past two years, at a time when Israel is more prepared than ever to delineate a border and despite the “revelations” of al-Jazeera, bears eloquent witness to this phenomenon.

For years I have argued that Israeli moderation, as expressed in the gradual ideological compromises made by both left- and right-wing governments that culminated in Netanyahu’s dramatic “two states for two peoples” declaration, has generated among the Palestinians and the broader Arab world the perception that Israel’s concessions are caused by terrorist attrition and that they reflect a loss of faith in the justice of Israel’s cause. When Israelis lose a sense of justice, their struggle is weakened accordingly. That’s why every display of Palestinian determination has generated greater Israeli flexibility. The current, two-year-old Palestinian determination to boycott talks—the most extensive and clever in terms of its diplomatic management—will bring yet more Israeli flexibility, and so on and on.

It seems to me that the Palestinians understand Israel is very close to more concessions, including on the Golan Heights, that correspond geographically with the API. But if they agree to negotiate, they will be hard put to explain to the Americans, the Europeans and perhaps even the Saudis (assuming their plan is real and not a diversion) why they don’t meet Israel’s far-reaching concessions half-way. The explanation is that for them the border, meaning the extent of Israel’s withdrawal, is not the heart of the conflict and of their resistance. Yet as long as Israel has not reached the bottom line of its territorial concessions—meaning the line the Palestinians have drawn—they can simply dig in behind their territorial claims.

The al-Jazeera leaks, if authentic, confirm this: at the last moment the Palestinians canceled what they had ostensibly agreed to and refused to sign a deal with the Olmert government. Worse, even if the documents are forged and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Mahmoud Abbas did not make the commitment attributed to him, why shouldn’t he step forward as a leader and reply: “While I did not make the commitment attributed to me, it is acceptable to me”. That is how we could make peace.

Now that the Likud government is prepared to follow the path of the left, and in view of the sweeping denial by the Palestinian leadership regarding the al-Jazeera documents, the cat is out of the bag: it’s not

the border issue that focuses the Palestinians' attention, but the right of return, along with rejection of the Zionist founding principle whereby the state of Israel is the national home of the Jewish people.

Foregoing the right of return is harder for the Palestinians than territorial concessions, if only because they never had territory. Palestinian or Arab agreement that Israel is the national home of the Jewish people is not possible. That would oblige them to declare that the territory of the state of Israel is Jewish and not Arab land. And because they cannot embrace these two declarative concessions, they have broken off contact, despite the knowledge that they are on the verge of getting most of their territorial demands, including de facto and eventually de jure sovereignty in Jerusalem.—*Published January 26, 2011*

The politics of illusion

by As'ad Ghanem

What is the alternative to politics as a mechanism to achieve concrete goals and interests of the group, the nation or the state? The natural and logical alternative for what is considered to be the legitimate leadership of a group is to move on two different levels: first, redefining the group's interests or targets, and second, redesigning the strategies for achieving those goals.

The Palestinian case represents a collapse of politics. Put differently, the Palestine Liberation Organization leadership insists on maintaining a politics of illusion that totally contradicts the facts on the ground. Worse, the PLO leadership declares that its aim is to achieve a political mission that totally contradicts previous declarations and understandings with the Israeli side. This is correct for the main topics that are related to a permanent solution of the Palestinian problem: refugees, Jerusalem, borders of the future Palestinian state and the whole package of what is considered by this leadership a "just solution for the Palestinian cause".

Here we shall concentrate on the question of the borders of the future Palestinian state. According to the declared objectives of the Arab Peace Initiative, which is endorsed by the PLO leadership, the goal is "full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines as well as

the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon”, along with the establishment of a “sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital”. The Palestinian leadership has launched a public political and diplomatic campaign that aims to convince the international community to accept these goals and to recognize such a state.

These declarations and the effort to obtain international recognition for a Palestinian state are taking place under the shadow of three main facts. First, the current PLO leadership does not have the legitimacy to continue to represent Palestinian goals. Second, these declarations serve as an alternative to the real achievement of a viable Palestinian state, blocked by official Israeli rejection. And third, the PLO leadership has totally failed to convince the Obama administration to put any real pressure on Israel in order to make a minor positive gesture such as freezing settlement construction, even for only three months.

Instead of making hard decisions based on the conclusion that an independent Palestinian state is not a political option any more, that Oslo and the API are only lip-service to continued Israeli hegemony over the Palestinians, that US decisions concerning the future of the Israeli-Palestinian problem are totally biased, and that no US administration could serve as an honest broker, the PLO leadership chooses to continue with the politics of illusion. It presents a promising future for the Palestinians by totally misleading the Palestinian people—as if the demand for full Israeli withdrawal with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state is still an achievable goal.

Instead of re-evaluating Palestinian goals and strategies, for example by reopening the 1948 file and seeking a one-state solution, the PLO leadership chooses to launch a campaign of illusions. It is trying to convince the Palestinian people that the current political path is an appropriate way to achieve its goals.

In contradiction to its declared objectives, the current PLO leadership undertook to negotiate with Israel over the establishment of a Palestinian state while agreeing at the same time that the major Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem continue to be part of Israel in the permanent solution. This means the PLO leadership is willing to accept “facts on the ground” in East Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank and agrees to accommodate a position that is considered in Israel to enjoy consensus support by both the Jewish public and the leadership and elites: no return to the 1967 borders.

The PLO leadership is trying to convince the Palestinian people, the Arab world and many others of a false hope. It is agreeing to accept a truncated Palestinian state without Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied in 1967 and without huge parts of East Jerusalem. It is “declarations” that are the politics of the PLO, not real achievements on the ground. The PLO leaders are convinced that publishing declarations and disseminating illusions will serve their goal of staying in power. Meanwhile, Palestinians will continue to suffer without a hope for a just solution to their problem.—*Published January 26, 2011*

Syria's two red lines

by Elias Samo

The Arab Peace Initiative adopted unanimously by the Arab summit in Beirut in March 2002 constitutes a giant Arab leap forward on the road to Arab-Israel peace. For Arabs, the initiative represents a new era of accepting Israel compared with the preceding decades-long rejectionist era epitomized by the Khartoum three “nos”: no peace, no recognition and no negotiations.

The initiative represents an Arab collective consensus on a total and comprehensive peace package with Israel. The unanimously-adopted API required a lot of courage on the part of Arab leaders, because what they say in the initiative is a total reversal of entrenched Arab positions vis-a-vis Israel. Thus, the Arab leaders state that the Palestinian problem is the consequence of the 1967 war and if the damage caused by that war—Israeli occupation of Arab territory—is undone, then the conflict will be settled, as if nothing happened prior to 1967 with the exception of a shy and ambiguous reference to the refugee problem. As if there were no Nakba, expulsions, killings, the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages, occupation of land, building of settlements on occupied land and an attempt to eradicate Palestine from human memory.

The Arab leaders also say that they are willing to make peace with Israel, knowing it extends from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south, thus dividing the Arab world into two permanently disjointed parts, east and west, and preventing any possibility of Arab

geographic unity. And they state as Arab leaders that while they know, as do Arabs, Muslims and many others, that Zionism is a racist colonial settlement project, they nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of racist Zionism and the right of expansionist Israel to exist.

For Syria, the presumed rejectionist, to have supported such an initiative was eye-opening to say the least. What made it possible for Syria to swallow the API was the fact that Article 2-I “calls upon Israel to affirm ... Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines”. This provided Syria what it had always insisted upon: that withdrawal from the Golan is not negotiable.

Article 2-I is consistent with the two red lines President Bashar Assad refused to cross in any peace agreement with Israel. First, Syria would not accept an agreement with Israel that gives Damascus less than what President Anwar Sadat got in the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty: an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai to the June 4, 1967 line (which at the time Syria condemned vehemently as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause). The second red line is the “Rabin deposit” in which Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin committed Israel to withdraw from the Golan within the framework of a Syrian-Israeli peace package.

It is generally accepted even by some Israeli leaders that the cornerstone of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria is what article 2-I calls for. The question is, if the Israeli leadership is genuinely interested in peace with Syria, why hasn't it accepted the API? For the Syrians as well as other Arabs, the API is the litmus test of Israeli peace intentions and the Israelis have failed that test. Israel could and should have either accepted the initiative with reservations or put its counter plan on the table. It did neither and proved to the Arabs that its intentions are not toward peace with the Arabs, but something else.

The irony is that while the Syrian and Arab motive behind offering the API was to close the gap separating the two sides and get closer to a peace agreement, what has happened in view of Israel's rejection of the initiative is a rise in radical, intolerant and rejectionist religious sentiments and movements on both sides. Both have lost faith in and turned against the peace process. Therefore, it is very unlikely there will be peace between the two sides any time soon, irrespective of the fair and reasonable API.

Does this mean that the initiative is dead? The Israelis are behaving as if it is, and they keep pounding new nails in its coffin: no withdrawal to

the 1967 lines, resumption of settlement construction, Jerusalem will remain the united capital of Israel, the Arabs must recognize Israel as a Jewish state, etc.

Finally, for Syria, article 2-I falls within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, the Madrid Conference's "land for peace" formula and Rabin's deposit. Therefore, President Bashar's hand for peace with Israel remains extended even though there is no taker on the other side. For Israel, the choice is between article 2-I and the status quo. However, since the Golan has been quiet for almost four decades and "if it ain't broke, don't fix it", Israel has opted for the status quo. Israel is gambling on the necessary—peace—in the hope of winning the superfluous, land. This is a dangerous and unnecessary gamble.—*Published December 1, 2010*

A Syrian perspective

by Imad Moustapha

Two important developments took place in November that will leave an indelible impact on the peace process (or lack thereof) in the Middle East.

First, the US offered Israel an unprecedented bribe for simply agreeing not to undermine the prospects of resuming talks with the Palestinians for a mere 90 days. In return for extending the moratorium on building settlements in the West Bank—that excludes Jerusalem—the US administration has committed itself to providing Israel with both the wherewithal to further consolidate its occupation of Arab territories, and a guarantee to oppose any attempt to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state. In the long annals of US acquiescence to Israeli blackmail, this is a remarkably unique instance of amply rewarding the culprit for agreeing to partially abstain from breaking international law for a brief period of time.

Second, the Israeli Knesset passed a resolution that will prevent any Israeli government from evacuating the occupied East Jerusalem and Syrian Golan without a general referendum. Given the stark shift to the right in the Israeli body politic, one immediately realizes that the real purpose of this resolution is to render the possibility of freeing East Jerusalem or the Golan a practical impossibility.

The implications of both actions are grave and nefarious. They only reaffirm that the Israeli government lacks both the will and the capacity to make peace with any of its neighbors.

By imposing additional constraints on the possibility of an eventual Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, the Israeli Knesset is legislating what is illegal and unlawful. By doing so, it reveals to the rest of the world the extent of Israel's obstructionist stance toward the Obama administration's peace efforts and the Mitchell mission.

Meanwhile, Syria still believes that peace should be given a chance. A paramount national objective of Syria is freeing its occupied Golan from the Israeli military occupation, and allowing the Syrian population expelled from the Golan to return to their towns, villages and homes.

For Syria, the return of the occupied Golan back to the June 4, 1967 line is non-negotiable. Complete and full withdrawal to that line is not only the basis for a just solution, but also for conducting peace talks with Israel. Negotiations would focus solely on the modalities and implementation of a peace agreement.

All parties will benefit if the return of the occupied Syrian Golan can be achieved through peaceful negotiations based on the principle of land-for-peace. However, patience has its limits, and Syria cannot be expected to wait endlessly until the other side understands that ending occupation is the only means to attain peace. With the passage of time, more and more Syrians are losing faith in the possibility of achieving this through peaceful negotiations.

For this reason, Syria insisted in the last round of Turkish-mediated indirect peace talks with Israel that it will not move toward direct talks unless Israel guarantees that the line of June 4, 1967 will be the basis for a peace agreement. Syria believes that if direct peace talks resume without guarantees for their fruitful conclusion, the repercussions for those who still believe in the possibility of a negotiated peace agreement will be devastating.

However, most importantly, Syria realizes and firmly believes that the core of the Arab-Israel conflict is the Palestinian question. Here lie two issues: Jerusalem and the right of return. It is only when an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian state is established that real peace can prevail throughout our region.

As such, the pan-Arab peace initiative remains the only available option at present.

Whereas it came as no surprise that Israel flatly rejected this peace plan, the lingering setback rests in the total incapacity of successive US administrations to comprehend the merits of this initiative and, in turn, utilize their leverage on Israel to seriously consider it.

Until this happens, if ever, Syria believes that all available options should be pursued to guarantee our inalienable right: the return of the land to its rightful owners.—*Published December 1, 2010*

On Jerusalem

Arab demand for East Jerusalem is an obstacle to peace

by Efraim Inbar

One of the reasons the Arab Peace Initiative received a cold shoulder in Israel is its demand for the establishment of a Palestinian state “with East Jerusalem as its capital”. A large majority of Israelis are ready for the partition of the Land of Israel and for the establishment of a Palestinian state, but they reject the Palestinian demand for a return to the 1967 line, particularly in Jerusalem. The Arab-backed Palestinian demand to partition Jerusalem is a major obstacle to peace.

This demand seems to reflect the Arab refusal to accept Jewish religious, national and historic claims to Jerusalem, and particularly the deep attachment to the Temple Mount. In contrast to Muslims and Christians, Jews have prayed for thousands of years toward Jerusalem. The Temple Mount is the holiest Jewish site, while no other religion relegates to Jerusalem such an importance. Israelis are bewildered by the campaign of the Palestinian Authority to negate the historic existence of the first and second temples. The recent research commissioned by the PA to prove that the Western Wall is not a place with Jewish religious links is further undermining the little faith Israelis have in Palestinian intentions.

Jerusalem has not been the capital of any Muslim or Arab political entity since the Arab invasion of Palestine in the seventh century. In contrast, it has been the capital of three sovereign Jewish states. Therefore, the demand to make Jerusalem, of all cities, the capital of a Palestinian state that never existed before looks very unreasonable. It is disconnected from the political history of the city and seems to constitute mainly a denial of Jewish roots in the city and in the Temple Mount.

The insistence on East Jerusalem is unreasonable also because Jews have held a majority in the entire city for the past 150 years. If the Palestinians claim sovereignty in parts of Palestine because there is an Arab majority there, the same principle of self-determination applies for Jerusalem. Two-thirds of Jerusalemites are Jewish. Even the Arab minority in the city has shown its preference for living under Israeli rule, as many have moved to the Israeli side of the security barrier being built around Jerusalem. Recent polls show much reluctance on the part of Jerusalem Arab residents, Christians and Muslims, to be included in a Palestinian state. Their choice is reasonable, as Jerusalem offers the quality of life of a modern western democratic city while only a few kilometers away the norm is a third world standard of living, chaos and religious intolerance.

Jerusalem's importance to the Jews is not only historic and religious; the city also holds strategic importance in controlling the only highway from the Mediterranean coast to the Jordan Valley along which military forces can move with little interference from Arab population concentrations. Jerusalem is the linchpin for erecting a security zone along the Jordan Rift. If Israel wants to maintain a defensible border in the east, it needs to secure the east-west axis from the coast to the Jordan Valley via an undivided Jerusalem and Maaleh Adumim.

Keeping greater Jerusalem, which includes the settlement blocs that US President George W. Bush recognized as realities that must be accommodated in a future agreement, is a strategic imperative. Arguments that ignore the immense potential for political upheaval east of the Jordan River and the fluctuating nature of military technology in order to minimize the military importance of Jerusalem and its central role in Israel's eastern line of defense are simplistic and/or opportunistic. Designing stable and defensible borders in accordance with current, but transient, state-of-the-art technology and political circumstances is strategically foolish.

Dividing Jerusalem within an attempt to end the highly-charged Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a recipe for continuous tensions. A divided city,

where a dispute over a garbage pail or a child's toy could escalate into full scale inter-state conflict, would be a political and municipal powder keg.

The partition of Jerusalem is simply a bad idea when the Zeitgeist dictates uniting cities such as Berlin, Belfast or Nicosia. Why should Jerusalem be different? An undivided Jerusalem is the best guarantee of a better life for all Jerusalemites.

The most practical reason for discarding the demand to divide Jerusalem is that it is a deal-breaker. Israeli public opinion is committed to maintaining the status quo in Jerusalem. Polls show that over two-thirds of Israelis reject the division of Jerusalem. When asked whether Israel should relinquish its control over the Temple Mount, over 70 percent of Israelis disagree, reflecting the electrifying hold of this holy site on the Jewish psyche. Such feelings are politically potent, foreclosing the possibility that Israelis will sit idly by and watch a transfer of sovereignty.

Israeli concessions in Jerusalem have continuously lacked the necessary domestic political support. After Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered to divide Jerusalem in 2000, his coalition disintegrated (for other reasons as well). Similarly, in 2008, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert experienced coalition difficulties because he placed Jerusalem on the negotiators' agenda. No Israeli government is likely to survive concessions in Jerusalem in the current political constellation. If elections are held in the near future, the strength of opposition to any concessions in Jerusalem will only grow.

In sum, the unreasonable Arab demand for dividing Jerusalem is an obstacle to a better future. Most Jews see it as "*hutzpah*" (insolence).—
Published January 12, 2011

Jerusalem challenges the API

by Daniel Seidemann

The Arab Peace Initiative makes cursory reference to the issue of Jerusalem, stating only that East Jerusalem should become the capital of the Palestinian state. Yet the underlying architectural principles of the API can be identified, articulated and extrapolated to Jerusalem. In sum, the API re-frames "land for peace" into "end of occupation in

exchange for legitimacy”. It includes closure of the “1948 file”—end of claims—in exchange for acceptance of the 1967 border. How will these principles interact with the ebb and flow of Israeli fears and hopes regarding the future of Jerusalem?

The API points in the direction of a politically-divided Jerusalem, based on the binary principles of territorial sovereignty defined by the green line. This approach dovetails with the growing awareness in Israel that a unified, bi-national Jerusalem is not in Israel’s national interest, and that over time, Israeli rule over close to 300,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem is not sustainable. The Israeli attitude towards occupation is increasingly reminiscent of Thomas Jefferson’s quip that slavery is like holding a wolf by the ears: you don’t dare hold on, and you are scared to let go. The API has the potential to provide a framework for Israel to “let go” of occupation in East Jerusalem, not as a retreat, but as a bold move made in the service of the two-state solution, and justifying a division of the city.

On the other hand, if the API devoutly sanctifies the green line, thereby mandating a dismantling of all Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, it is not likely to have much traction within Israel. There are 195,000 Israelis living in these settlements, and a proposed agreement that requires them to be uprooted will not likely get very far. But it is noteworthy that the Palestinian negotiating team has acknowledged publicly that the API does allow for mutually-agreed territorial adjustments that deviate from the green line. If this is indeed the case, the API principles offer Israelis the incentive of transforming the bulk of their settlements in East Jerusalem into universally-recognized parts of sovereign Israel.

The API is rooted in the language of legitimacy, and it is in this context that its potential impact on Israeli public opinion is greatest. There are no embassies in Jerusalem, nor does any state recognize the city as the capital of Israel. Ironically, it is only the Palestinians, acting in the framework of the API, who can deliver to Israel what it craves most in Jerusalem: legitimacy. A political division of Jerusalem will encounter fierce domestic opposition in Israel—but a division of Jerusalem that brings with it broad recognition of Jewish Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, alongside the Palestinian capital of al-Quds, and with Arab embassies in both, will exponentially increase support for such an agreement within Israel.

If it is possible to envisage an agreed border in Jerusalem under API principles that deviates from the green line, it is highly unlikely that such accommodations will apply to the volcanic core of the conflict:

the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and its environs. The API is less prone to be sympathetic to ideas like a special regime in the Old City (ostensibly offered by Ehud Olmert to Mahmoud Abbas) or inventive ideas like “divine sovereignty” on the Haram/Mount (as articulated by the late King Hussein). Any attempt to construe the API in a manner that falls short of “full-stop” Palestinian or Arab sovereignty on the Haram/Mount would be an exercise in self-delusion.

This is the real challenge for the API. Achieving an Israeli waiver of sovereign claims to the Mount/Haram and the surrounding areas will be one of the most daunting challenges of any permanent status agreement.

The potential to secure an Israeli waiver of sovereign claims, to the extent such potential exists, is embedded in the logic of the API. Israelis correctly perceive Palestinian/Arab denials of historic Jewish connections to Jerusalem as a litmus test, disclosing the acceptance or rejection of authentic Jewish connections to Israel/Palestine. Absent an affirmative acceptance of these connections, demands to cede Israeli sovereignty on the Temple Mount would almost certainly be rejected out of hand, as such an action would for Israelis be accompanied by a sense of violation and feared loss of legitimacy of the entire historic enterprise that is modern Israel.

On the other hand, were the permanent status agreement, loyal to the inner logic of the API, to include declarations recognizing the legitimacy of Jewish attachments and provisions guaranteeing the inviolability of Jewish equities under Palestinian/Arab sovereignty, the calculus could change significantly. In effect, the Palestinian/Arab sovereign would declare itself the custodian of Jewish memories and their physical embodiments. The act of assuring protection of archeological artifacts and guaranteeing access for non-Muslims to the Haram/Mount would significantly increase the willingness of Israelis to entertain the possibility of such sovereignty. And, indeed, such a development is not implausible: today, from Rabat to Beirut, Cairo and Damascus, Arab governments are restoring Jewish synagogues because the historic, legitimate Jewish presence in their countries is part of their interpretation of Arab civilization—an interpretation shared by the API.

In conclusion, the API has the potential to “speak the language” of Jerusalem well. Its focus on the green line, with agreed modifications, is consistent with the growing consensus in Israel that Israeli rule over East Jerusalem is untenable in the long run. And indeed, based on the API’s principles, validating Jewish attachments to areas that fall under Palestinian/Arab sovereignty—an act that would, in parallel, demand

validation of Muslim attachments to sites within Israel, like the Mamilla cemetery—would likely be far less difficult than resolving what for the Palestinians and the Arab world is the highly problematic Israeli demand for recognition of “the Jewish character” of Israel.

All that said, the concern, even passion, in the Arab world regarding Jerusalem/al-Quds is undoubtedly genuine—but not always accompanied by a familiarity with the rival equities in the city, an appreciation of the city’s real-time complexities, or a respect for the genuine concerns of Israelis and Jews. For these reasons, stakeholders in the API need to begin to educate themselves and their populations about Jerusalem. In doing so, they can begin to leverage the API to make real progress on Jerusalem. They can use it to generate potential permanent status positions that are compatible with both the complexities of the city and the sensitivities in the Jewish, Muslim and Christian worlds, and that contribute to building confidence in the API as a tool to energize Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts and, ultimately, achieve Israel-Arab peace.—Published *January 12, 2011*

What state without Jerusalem?

by Huda Imam

“Another Palestinian symbol is being demolished today in Jerusalem!”

It’s an early Sunday morning in January, misty skies cover Jerusalem, and my son wakes me up saying: “Mama, they are demolishing the Shepherd Hotel.”

I was born and continue to live on a quiet residential street of Sheikh Jarrah, Baybers Street (which references the Mamluk al-Thaher Baybers). As a child, I remember my father’s story about the Muslim conqueror Salah Eddine al-Ayyoubi who asked his surgeon who lived in this neighborhood, across the street from our home, to cure Richard the Lion Heart. That was in 1187 in Jerusalem. Amazing, how they were enemies at war and yet This story about Salah Eddine always impressed me, probably because of the thirst Palestinians have today for a brave, yet kind and humane leader to rescue Jerusalem and its people from bulldozers.

Walking along the road in this once safe, residential Palestinian quarter, named in honor of Sheikh Jarrah, I recall other family stories of Issaf Nashashibi, who invited the likes of al-Rasafi, Khalil Sakakini, and Touqan to cultural evenings in his blue mosaic palace. I remember where Musa Alami, a brilliant Palestinian who played a key role under the British Mandate, also spent his days in the Mashrou' al-Inshai', with judge Nihad Jarallah, and the antiquary Victor Hallak and even more Palestinian Jerusalemite legacies.

Today, as I walk along the streets of Sheikh Jarrah, I spot huge ugly buildings: Israeli police headquarters built on the skeleton and foundations of a hospital, along the typical Jerusalem slope where we used to sled as children when it snowed.

The quiet of morning is broken by the sounds of Israeli intelligence officers coming from the home they confiscated as an office in 1967. The house belongs to the Murad family, and was rented by the Saudi Arabian consulate. Another conquest, another property, and again—as in 1948—the “absentee law” is applied even when owners are present.

What's left of this neighborhood? A few Palestinian families who every day fear being thrown out, together with the nine “loyal” consulates: the French, Belgian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Italian, British, US and Swedish, respecting the city's “corpus separatum”—and let's not forget the symbolic office of the European Union.

What's a Palestinian state worth without the people of Sheikh Jarrah, Wadi Joz and the Mount of Olives?

What is its capital worth when the Old City is full of Jewish settlers? When extremist Jewish families are invited to dance in the streets of Tariq al-Wad, Souq Aftimos and Bab Khan al-Zeit to celebrate “Yom Yerushalayem” (“Jerusalem Day”) when Palestinians who happen to live in Gaza and the West Bank, today the suburbs of Jerusalem, cannot even dream of reaching the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for *Sept il-Noor* (Saturday of Light) or the al-Aqsa Mosque on *Lailat al-Qader* (Night of Power)?

What's a Palestinian state worth when its capital's university is beyond two walls?

What's a state worth without freedom of education and freedom of movement?

What does a Palestinian state mean to Jerusalemites obsessed with keeping their blue Israeli identity cards that actually only give them the “privilege” to be considered “tourists” or temporary residents in their own city?

Despite all this injustice on the ground aimed at deleting Palestinianhood and the identity of the past and present, with a Museum of Tolerance being built on a seventh century Islamic cemetery—where Jamal Eddine my grandfather is buried—with house demolitions, identity and land confiscations practiced every day, I want to believe in a better future.

Despite the exhaustion of peace initiatives and the compromises made by the Palestinian leadership, the Arab Peace Initiative is a unique opportunity. The fact that Israel did not grasp it proves that neither its government nor its people have the good will to live side-by-side with Palestinians. Instead, Israel acts to try to make peace with the Arab world, secure its borders and develop its economy, casting Palestinians aside.

It requires bravery and humanity to bring justice, equality and freedom—this kind of peace begins with a Palestinian state in Jerusalem.—
Published January 12, 2011

Protecting my rights

an interview with Jamil Hamammi

bitterlemons-api: What does it mean to you that the Arab Peace Initiative indicates that Jerusalem should be the capital of the Palestinian state?

Hamammi: This designation is very natural. The Arab Peace Initiative that spoke of the peace process, from its beginning announces that Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian state and has religious significance for Muslims and Christians. I believe that this designation of Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state is the very least that Palestinians can accept.

bitterlemons-api: Do you think Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state is still possible, despite the Israeli settlement project?

Hamammi: The truth is that Israel destroyed what is called the “peace process.” I am not fundamentally convinced in coexistence with these [Israeli] governments that are based on removing the other, and lack of recognition of the other, and on wiping out one people to replace it with another, and—as the international Zionist movement advertises—bases its work on “a land without a people for a people without a land.”

All the practices of the Israeli government—whether from the left or the right—have demolished any possibility for there to be peace programs in the region. And what it practices now, in demolishing the Palestinian people’s historic places (for example the demolition of the Shepherd’s Hotel), and the demolition of homes and bulldozing of lands and disenfranchising of Jerusalemites, has destroyed the possibility for coexistence in the city of Jerusalem.

bitterlemons-api: Are you willing to share Jerusalem, as the capital of two states?

Hamammi: I believe that Jerusalem should stay one city, and the city that I know and studied in and lived in and raised my sons in will not accept its division. The city has the Palestinian people’s holy places, whether they be Christian or Muslim.

bitterlemons-api: What does it mean to you to be a Jerusalemite?

Hammami: It means that I must carry this beloved city in my mind, my heart and my soul as a Jerusalemite, and practice my rights as a resident of this city. I must protect my residency and my right to live here, and not allow myself to be expelled from this city and the holy al-Aqsa Mosque, as some of the Jerusalem representatives are being expelled by Israeli authorities. —*Published January 12, 2011*

A sovereign independent Palestinian state

The nature of Palestinian sovereignty

by Mkhaimar Abusada

The Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted by the Arab League at its summit meeting in Beirut in 2002, is a comprehensive peace initiative first proposed by then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, and re-endorsed at the Riyadh summit in 2007. The initiative attempts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, which means normalizing relations between the entire Arab region and Israel in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in June 1967 and a “just solution” of the Palestinian refugee problem based on United Nations Resolution 194.

One of the main elements of the Arab initiative stipulates: “The acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since the 4th of June 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

The issue of sovereignty and independence is of great interest and importance to Palestinians. They have not experienced independence or sovereignty in modern history. After World War I, Palestine fell under the British Mandate until 1948, and then Israel controlled 78 percent of mandatory Palestine. The West Bank was then annexed by Jordan, and Gaza was administered by Egypt, both until 1967. As a result of the June 1967 war, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been living under Israeli occupation.

The Oslo accords, signed in September 1993, led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority over parts of the West Bank and Gaza. They have deprived Palestinians of any elements of sovereignty or independence and kept the PA under total Israeli control. Palestinian movement from and into the PA territories is subject to Israeli approval. Commercial exports and imports are also subject to Israeli laws and regulations according to the Paris Economic Protocol.

“Sovereignty”, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is the quality of having supreme, independent authority over a geographic area, such as a territory. The concept has been discussed and debated throughout history, from the time of the Romans through to the present day, where the notion of globalization has motivated new debates. Although the term has

changed in its definition, concept and application, the current notion of state sovereignty is often traced back to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which, in relation to states, codified the basic principles of territorial integrity, border inviolability and supremacy of the state. A sovereign is the supreme lawmaking authority within its jurisdiction.

Sovereignty means the right of the state of Palestine to become a full member of the United Nations General Assembly, adopt the UN charter, and conform to international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other related UN documents. The state of Palestine will also be subject to its own constitution and legal norms.

“Sovereignty” for Palestinians means a total end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. It means that Palestinians alone will control their territory, air space, electromagnetic field and water within their own territory. It means the ability to enact laws and implement them over its citizens.

It also means the right of the Palestinian state to form an army and national security to defend territorial integrity and borders. It means the ability to defend the territory from outside enemies and aggression. But Palestine will not need to enter into military alliances, an act that violates the terms of peace and normalization with Israel.

Sovereign Palestine means the right to establish and conduct foreign and diplomatic relations with other countries to pursue peace and prosperity. No country can live in isolation from the community of nations. Countries cooperate in political, economic, security and cultural aspects, and Palestine shall be given the right to develop and pursue its diplomatic relations with Arab and Islamic—as well as western—countries.

It also means Palestine’s ability to administer and oversee the holy sites within its territory. Palestine is home to the three major religions, thus requiring it to respect and protect Jews, Christians and Muslims. Religious sites, especially those in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, must be accessed by their respective observers. Palestine must establish a ministry to preach peace, tolerance and acceptance among all people.

Sovereign and independent Palestine will not live in a vacuum. It will be part of the community of nations that respects international law and human rights, and will do all it takes to pursue peace, security and prosperity in the region. —*Published January 5, 2011*

A perspective from Jordan

by *Hassan Barari*

The Arab Peace Initiative, endorsed collectively by Arab states in Beirut in March 2002, calls upon Israel to affirm “the acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

As noted by Jordan’s former foreign minister, Marwan Muashar, Jordan was instrumental in creating the momentum behind the API. Jordan’s position stemmed from a new reading that began to take shape in the mid-1990s that viewed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state positively.

Contrary to what some still argue, Jordan’s official position is crystal clear. On several occasions, King Abdullah II has not only made clear that Jordan has zero ambition regarding Palestinian land, but he also argued that the failure to establish an independent, viable and geographically contiguous Palestinian state bordering Jordan would be detrimental to Jordan’s national security and stability. If Israel accepts the two-state solution idea as delineated in the API, this means the Palestinians will have sovereignty over the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Based on statements coming from Jordanian officials—particularly the king—Jordan would be quick to support such an outcome.

That said, three issues are relevant. First, will Jordan be safer once a Palestinian state is established on its western border? A senior Jordanian official, speaking anonymously, argues that since Jordan has managed to protect its borders with Israel, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, it will also be in a position to protect its border with a would-be Palestinian state and will be successful in preventing the infiltration of weapons into the newly-established state. Jordanian officials make the case that they have conveyed to the Israelis the position of Jordan on the matter of borders.

The second point concerns a specific part of the Old City in Jerusalem. Article 9 of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty states that “Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem. When negotiations on the permanent status will take place, Israel will give high priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines.” Jordan insisted on the inclusion of this article in

the treaty; failing to do so would have created a vacuum in Jerusalem that Israel might have filled. But will Jordan transfer this role to the Palestinians if the latter arrive at a comprehensive peace treaty with Israel whereby they restore East Jerusalem to Arab rule?

There is a tendency in Jordan to do so, but only in the event the Palestinians manage to practice sovereignty over the Muslim holy site there, Haram al-Sharif. Jordan most probably will stick to its right stipulated in Article 9 if the outcome is otherwise. On different occasions, Jordan has floated the idea that sovereignty at Haram al-Sharif is for God, a statement that does not resonate well with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Third, it is hard to avoid the sense that the mere establishment of an independent Palestinian state will hardly reassure Jordan when it comes to the thorniest issue: a solution to the refugee and displaced persons problem. By far, the refugee problem is the most vital interest and is widely seen as the most significant issue in final status negotiations. Jordan hosts roughly 40 percent of the Palestinian refugees and nearly 90 percent of the displaced persons of Palestinian origin.

Over the last few years, a school of thought has emerged with regard to the refugees and displaced persons. In light of the current demographic balance between Transjordanians and Palestinians in Jordan, a growing number of Transjordanians strongly believe that unless the refugees practice their right of return, Jordan will run the risk of compromising its identity—an issue of great relevance to the kingdom's stability. Fahad Khitan, a leading and credible Jordanian columnist, makes the case that any solution that does not address the issue of refugees will be a catastrophe for Jordan.

Article 8 of the Jordanian-Israeli treaty committed both sides to seek a solution to the refugee problem “in negotiations, in a framework to be agreed, bilateral or otherwise, in conjunction with and at the same time as the permanent status negotiations”. Now the API calls for finding an agreed solution to the refugee problem. However, there is a feeling among Jordanians that Israel will not agree to allow refugees to return to Israel proper. Compounding this fear, the PLO might cut a deal with Israel whereby it sacrifices Jordan's interests when it comes to the refugee issue. In fact, a former Jordanian prime minister is on record warning that the PLO might strike a deal at the expense of Jordan.

In short, an agreement on a sovereign Palestinian state that puts off the refugee file, let alone foregoes the refugees' right of return,

is not advantageous from a Jordanian perspective. Therefore, any negotiations over the refugees and Jerusalem should take into account the position of Jordan. In fact, Jordan should be brought to the table, particularly when discussion turns to the issue of refugees.

Attractive as it may look, the benefits of establishment of an independent Palestinian state should be gauged by how much it helps solve the refugee problem.—*Published January 5, 2011*

The initiative vs. the reality

by Shlomo Gazit

A key phrase in the Arab Peace Initiative speaks of the need for “the acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital”. This is no more than the definition of an aspiration, an objective. It must be analyzed in all its aspects, including the likelihood of its reaching fruition, with emphasis on the question of Palestine’s political sovereignty.

The *Britannica* states that “sovereignty is the quality of having supreme, independent authority over a geographic area, such as a territory.” Wikipedia goes on to assert that “sovereignty is a central concept linked to permission for a country to exercise force both domestically and externally. Force can take several expressions, one being the concentration of the instruments of violence of a state (army, police) in the hands of political authorities. This means they have the capacity to defend the country against elements hostile to it from within and from abroad.”

In examining the significance of this definition for the possible establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, two central questions immediately arise: the question of the state’s borders and the question of its authority and capacity to maintain an independent military force.

First, let us examine the question of a Palestinian state’s borders. The API places those borders on the June 4, 1967 lines. Concerning part of the territory of the state, there is ostensibly no problem: Israel withdrew

from the Gaza Strip in its entirety in 2005 and there is no impediment to this territory becoming part of a sovereign Palestinian state. Moreover, in the course of the past five years, the Gaza “state” has openly acquired arms. The Gaza regime employs these weapons domestically against its opponents and externally against Israel.

But there’s the rub: matters are not so simple. From an internal Palestinian standpoint, the Gaza Strip regime has to agree to accept the authority of the second part of the state in the West Bank and bow to the outcome of elections held among all Palestinian residents. At least for the moment the two sides are far from resolving this issue.

A second problem is that the physical link between the two parts of a Palestinian state is dependent on agreement with Israel to determine arrangements for safe passage and movement of people and goods. The conclusion is clear: this phrase in the API is not ripe for implementation.

We turn now to the borders of the eastern part of the prospective state, the West Bank. Here Israel is in control from both the political-judicial standpoint and in terms of security presence and activity. Further, during the years that have elapsed since 1967, facts on the ground have been created in terms of significant Israeli settlement, both quantitatively (more than half a million settlers) and by way of distribution throughout nearly all of the West Bank. The political and practical significance is clear: it will only be possible to activate Palestinian sovereignty through negotiations and diplomatic agreement with Israel or through removal of the Israeli presence by military force or diplomatic compellance.

Yet another aspect of the border question involves the Jordan River as eastern boundary of Palestine. Here, implementation of Palestinian sovereignty requires negotiations and agreement with the Hashemite Kingdom.

We now proceed to the second question, that of a sovereign Palestinian state’s authority and capacity to maintain an independent military force. I don’t know which of the problems suggested by this question is harder to resolve: Israel’s demand that the state be demilitarized of any offensive capability, or dismantling the military and ordnance accumulated in the Gaza Strip in recent years.

The arms currently held by Hamas in Gaza remind us of Lebanon’s dilemma as it faces the demand to acquiesce in the “sovereign” and independent existence and operations of the Hizballah army. A state of Palestine will not be able to exist at all, even in the West Bank alone,

unless Hamas is demilitarized and ceases to project the threat of force against the state's sovereignty.

Here we turn to the military relationship between the state of Palestine and Israel. We have already noted that Palestine cannot be sovereign in the territory allotted to it as long as the question of Israel's sovereign and physical presence in that territory is not resolved. Accordingly, negotiations and an agreement between the two sides will be required. Israel has demands, some perhaps even extreme, on the security question. These concern the length of time it will supervise agreed demilitarization arrangements, as well as of course the issue of permanent borders, meaning quite clearly the issue of maintaining the main settlement blocs in place under Israeli sovereignty and control.

To sum up, a sovereign Palestinian state as proposed by the API cannot be realized without negotiations that result in clear and binding agreements between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and between the new state and Israel.—*Published January 5, 2011*

Just Arab wishful thinking?

by Ghada Karmi

It is difficult to think of a term so frequently cited by political circles and with so little basis in reality as “the Palestinian state”. Even more illusory is the description of this non-existent state as “sovereign” and “independent”. These terms appear in Article 2 (III) of the Saudi-inspired Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab summit of 2002. The text speaks of, “the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital”—surely a statement about the triumph of hope over experience?

There is nothing new in the idea of a Palestinian state as such. It has taken shape over many decades, a remarkable phenomenon of something avidly pursued without actually happening, despite years of “peacemaking”. Partition of the land of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states was ushered in by the British mandatory government in the 1937 Peel Commission report as a solution to the conflict between Jews and Arabs at the time. It acquired more status with UN General Assembly

partition resolution 181, passed in 1947. By 1977, Palestinians (who had always rejected the idea of partition) began their gradual descent toward its acceptance when the Palestine National Council approved the establishment of an “independent national state” on any liberated Palestinian land. Not long after, the 1982 Saudi-sponsored Fez peace plan proposed the creation of an independent Palestinian state, following on from a similar Russian proposal in 1981.

But it was the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, passed by the PNC in November 1988 that put the seal on the Palestinian state concept. The state would be established in the 1967 territories (by implication), with (East) Jerusalem as its capital. The declaration is replete with references to “independence” and “sovereignty”. It validates itself by reference to the previously-rejected UN partition resolution, which declared the Arab and Jewish states to be sovereign, although it excluded Jerusalem. For the Palestinians, these attributes have been essential components of their hoped-for state.

In later developments, from the 1993 Oslo accords to the 2004 roadmap, this understanding of the meaning of statehood has remained the same. The tortuous discussions over Jerusalem’s Old City during the 2000 Camp David meeting between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization under US auspices were centered on the issue of sovereignty at the Haram al-Sharif. The absurd nature of the proposed arrangements is testament to the importance of the concept.

The current Palestinian proposal to ask the UN Security Council for recognition of a Palestinian state, which must be independent and sovereign, has revived the debate. The argument goes that if the peace negotiations are stalled and the agreed international position is for a two-state solution, it is logical to give the peace process aiming to achieve this a shot in the arm. This view has won international attention, which is now focused on whether it will happen and whether the US will veto such a proposal, or possibly abstain. There is considerable Israeli alarm over this turn of events, although tempered with cynicism. As Israel’s government spokesman, Mark Regev, pointed out to the BBC on January 5, the Palestinians made a similar declaration in 1988, recognized by nearly 100 world states, but “where did it get them?” In the same interview, Tony Blair, the Quartets’ usually blandly-spoken peace envoy, stressed the importance of the other side’s agreement to the success of any proposal.

Indeed so. Declarations and statements about an independent, sovereign Palestinian state can be endlessly reiterated, but they are meaningless

while they ignore the elephant in the room. Israel has never agreed to any such formulation of a Palestinian state, and no one has ever made it change position. Israel's current prime minister, for example, though he accepted the idea of a Palestinian state west of the Jordan River in an unprecedented speech in June 2009, spoke of "certain attributes of independence" for the state, but rejected many aspects of sovereignty. It would be demilitarized, he said, and its borders subject to Israeli control. No Israeli leader has ever gone beyond these conditions, especially not the architect of Oslo, Yitzhak Rabin, who did not object to Palestinians displaying the trappings of statehood, but no more.

A piece by Zalman Shoval in the Israeli daily *Israel Today* on January 2 sums up the Israeli attitude. Loss of control over the border with the putative Palestinian state would be a supreme security concern for Israel—impossible to relinquish. He cautioned dramatically against Israel falling into the same perils that America faces with no control over the Taliban in Afghanistan or over Iranian influence in Iraq.

Shoval's view is fairly representative of general Israeli opinion. Given that no one is prepared to end Israel's hold on Palestinian territory, even now, there can be no real sovereignty or independence for any Palestinian entity in no matter what borders. These worthy attributes may be enshrined in law and justice, but they must be implemented on the ground. Far better for the Arabs to recognize this and ditch their peace plan, which Israel has never accepted anyway. They and the Palestinian leadership must face reality. —*Published January 5, 2011*

ISRAELI IDEAS ON THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Why the API was ignored by Israel in 2002

by Yossi Alpher

The Arab League peace plan is a missed opportunity. Moderate Arab leaders, beginning with Saudi King Abdullah who initiated the plan, seem to have done almost everything possible to ensure that it finds an unfavorable reception in Israel. With courage and creativity, they could achieve better results. But so could Israel.

Israel's problems with the initiative began the day after it was proclaimed, with the Passover feast suicide bombing in Netanya that killed 30 celebrants. That act of Palestinian terror against Israel's holiday of national liberation had tremendous and tragic symbolic importance for Israelis and Jews everywhere. It precipitated a major military operation in the West Bank and quite understandably distracted Israelis' attention from the initiative. There is some evidence that the Islamist extremists that carried it out intended the timing as a rebuttal of the API. Yet the same Arab League that had just offered Israel peace offered not a word of condemnation of the attack. What were Israelis supposed to think?

The concluding paragraph in the League's initiative calls for its leadership to "pursue the necessary contacts to gain support ... at all levels". Over the years, with the exception of a single grudging trip to Jerusalem by two familiar visitors, the foreign ministers of Jordan and Egypt, the initiative has been presented by its sponsors to nearly every major power and international institution, but not to the country it addresses: Israel.

When the initiative was first published back in the spring of 2002, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was asked for his reaction. "Let [then Crown Prince] Abdullah come to Jerusalem to present it," Sharon said dismissively. And cynically: Sharon was highly skeptical about the prospects of real peace with Israel's Arab neighbors. Yet what could be more natural? Were Abdullah to follow in the footsteps of

Anwar Sadat and King Hussein and come to Jerusalem to present his initiative, the effect on Israeli public opinion would be electrifying.

Instead, the impression created over the years is that King Abdullah and the Arab League, rather than suggesting an agenda for discussion with Israel, are either going through the motions without really caring or seek to impose their plan on Israel without debate. Still, in March 2007 half the Israeli public thought the API could form the basis for regional peace negotiations and about 43 percent thought the government of Israel should at least consider embracing the plan. A number of prominent Israelis are prepared to accept the API with changes that the Arab League refuses to discuss. Kadima party leader Tzipi Livni, when foreign minister, stated that she could not accept the initiative only because of its reliance on United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 regarding the refugee issue. Needless to say, prominent among those Israelis who reject the API outright are the 25 percent or so of the public that rejects any peace initiative because of the territorial concessions they refuse to countenance on the Golan and in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Without doubt, the plan constitutes a dramatic and important step forward for the Arab approach. It offers Israel “normal relations”, a peace agreement and even “security for all the states of the region”. Certainly this is the first time the entire Arab world has even obliquely offered Israel security within a regional framework. While the API is decidedly not presented to Israel as a draft that is open to negotiation and modification, it is not too late for Israel to accept it while listing its reservations or concerns regarding one or two specific issues. Conceivably, this could serve as a basis for discussing with the Arab world some form of phasing of the API, as Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit at one point proposed: specific aspects of normalization in reward for specific steps toward peace. The Israeli public desperately needs to be made aware of such incentives for making painful compromises.

In co-producing bitterlemons-api.org, I hope that we can provide a useful forum precisely for discussing ideas like this, thereby enabling the API to emerge from the seemingly artificial constraints imposed on it by both sides.—*Published November 24, 2010*

Save a generation

by Omar Rahman

Just over one week after the ninth anniversary of the Arab Peace Initiative, some leaders within the Israeli business and security community have found the need to address this monumental peace proposal with a “partner declaration” of their own.

The latest initiative, launched on April 6, admittedly stems from fears that Israel is being diplomatically isolated on the international stage, that the region around it is changing dramatically, and that time is no longer on Israel’s side. Hence, it is imperative that the Israeli public put pressure on its leaders to save the two-state solution before it is too late.

The desire to engage with the Arab Peace Initiative, although belated, is well-founded. The political environment in the region is changing rapidly and there is no guarantee that the outcome will be favorable for Israel. However, even more fundamental than this is the transformation currently taking place within Palestinian society, and what may follow.

As Thomas Friedman wrote in a December 2010 column, the Americans cannot want peace more than the parties involved; likewise, Palestinians believe they should not want the two-state solution more than Israel. The feeling in Palestine is that while Palestinians have been working to negotiate two states for the last 20 years, Israel has been making that solution impossible by altering the situation on the ground.

And in reality, the two-state compromise only exists as long as Palestinians believe it is the best way forward, or at least a possibility. As soon as that impression is gone—and the world starts to agree—then the impetus for the fulfillment of Palestinian national rights becomes a push for equal rights in a single state.

At the moment, Palestinians are not far from reaching this conclusion. The younger generation of Palestinians, which is now beginning to take to the streets like their Arab counterparts, has no attachment to the two-state compromise, which was born out of the older generation of leaders’ inability to liberate the whole of their country. All they know is the situation as it exists today, and the record of injustice against Palestinians that they read in their history books.

Concurrently, the Palestinians in power are coming to terms with a peace process that has been unable to produce statehood, and may never do. The current Israeli government inspires no confidence among Palestinian leaders, and the steady shift of the Israeli public to the right does little to generate hope that future Israeli statesmen will be able to conclude a just solution.

These two things taken together could produce a reassessment of the Palestinian liberation struggle and its ultimate goals. The Palestinians accepted the two-state compromise, not because building a state on 22 percent of historic Palestine was a just solution, but because years of struggle forced certain elements inside the Palestine Liberation Organization into realizing that it was probably the best they would get. However, those leaders are now either gone or on their way out.

The new generation looks around and does not see even the possibility of two states because Israeli settlements have gobbled up the remaining land on the 22 percent. If, by September the United Nations recognizes the state of Palestine on the 1967 borders and Israel refuses to end its occupation, then it becomes much easier to convince the world that it is Israel that is making the two-state compromise impossible. At that point, the push for a single state becomes a realizable goal.

Thus, today there are some voices from within Israel calling for their country to be part of the group recognizing the state of Palestine at the UN in September. There are those who have sponsored the Israeli Peace Initiative, which provides a framework for peace more similar to former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's peace proposals in 2008 than those included in the Arab Peace Initiative. And there are many leaders from Israel's political left and right, including Ehud Barak, Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni, and perhaps even Binyamin Netanyahu and many others, that have come to terms with the necessity of a Palestinian state in order to prevent the emergence of a one-state movement.

Yet these leaders fail to understand that what is needed is a just solution, not one that tries to garner the best possible deal for Israel. The Palestinians already believe that two states is a major concession of their rights, but one they are willing to live with. However, if the contours of the Palestinian state continue to be chipped away at, and the settlements in and around Jerusalem are allowed to remain, then the prospect of a separate Palestinian state no longer seems appealing, and the most attractive alternative may be the long struggle for equal rights in one state.

If Israel accepts the precepts of the Arab Peace Initiative—full withdrawal to the 1967 lines and a just settlement to the refugee problem based on UN General Assembly Resolution 194—without caveats, then it may save us all from a protracted conflict that is sure to ruin the lives of another generation of Palestinians and Israelis, instead of fulfilling the promise of peace, security and prosperity that a mutually-acceptable agreement entails.—*Published April 13, 2011*

A sensible future

by Mennat Maassarani

The democratic awakening that has crept through most Arab countries in the past few months has left the planet in awe of the magnitude of a place long labeled the “third world”. Every Arab has witnessed a rapid change in societies long stagnant, ruled by dictators.

The people are still far from achieving their goals—yet they have taken the first steps. The future is still fogged by the unknown; the path not yet revealed. Now is the time to move forward with small torches to guide the footsteps. It started with Tunisia, followed instantly by Egypt and neighboring countries, all crying out for one goal: democracy. It should come as no surprise that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict joins them, as the oldest and most brutal conflict of them all.

For years on end, systems and tactics have been imposed to exploit third world countries, casting a shadow over life’s realities and resulting in overwhelming ignorance simply to weaken the people. If any of these dictators had been in touch with the evolution of human capabilities and technology, they would have anticipated the changing needs of their people and prepared techniques to maintain their goals. Instead, they applied old tactics that were no longer relevant and fired back by antagonizing the people, leading directly to failure.

Every system has a cycle that breaks down over time. This is precisely the case in the Arab world. The changes occurring nowadays are not only affecting states internally but have stretched to every inch of the world. Sooner or later, they will touch the long-lived Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If there is a time to create peace and start cooperating, it is now.

The Arab Peace Initiative of the 2002 Beirut summit proposed ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and normalizing relations between the entire Arab world and Israel. It didn't get the attention it deserved in those years nor at the Riyadh summit of 2007 when it was re-adopted. No wonder that it should rise once again with the current events—yet it requires all Arab countries and Israel to fully engage in order to achieve its purpose.

Israelis have been oppressed, diminished and exiled, but now the situation has changed. They have claimed a piece of land and established their state. The Middle East and North Africa area has many resources and all countries can benefit from mutual cooperation on the economic level. It's time for the Israelis to adopt new strategies if they want to live in peace with their neighbors, adapting to the new democratic demands of the Arabs. It is not to Israelis' advantage to isolate themselves and show no interest in an initiative that has gained the world's respect. Israel should consider withdrawing to the borders of 1967, which would locate both Israel and Palestine as two independent states practicing their rights equally.

At this point in time, history is being created, decisions made, tactics drawn, goals set and plans laid. Any step made will hugely alter the future, leaving the past behind. Now is the time to calculate all moves and act wisely.—*Published April 13, 2011*

We need a very different Arab League approach

by Mordechai Kedar

The Arab Peace Initiative comprises both positive and negative elements, and I have plenty to say about them. But I would prefer to describe an experience I had that, I believe, reflects the real objective of the API.

Several years ago, I appeared on the Arabic-language satellite channel Al-Hurra, which is run by the US State Department, in a discussion of the API. With me on the panel, from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, was Dr. Muhammad al-Zulfa, diplomatic adviser to King Abdullah. I believe, not without foundation, that he was the brains behind the API, which

entered the world as a Saudi initiative presented to the Arab League summit in March 2002 in Beirut.

In the ensuing televised discussion, I argued that the API comprised positive components like recognition of Israel and comprehensive Arab peace with us. The Arab League should, I stated, negotiate with Israel regarding the details. Al-Zulfa insisted that Israel must accept the plan word for word without deleting a single letter and implement it, only after which the Arabs would agree to talk to Israel. The Arabs would not negotiate with Israel over anything until the latter completed implementation. Al-Zulfa insisted this was a non-negotiable condition.

I went on to offer my opinion on this approach by posing a simple question: would Saudi Arabia accept and implement any proposal whatsoever, down to the most elementary issue, if it had not participated in drafting and determining the conditions? Is there any other Arab state that would agree to be dictated to by a foreign entity? Is it conceivable for Israel to accept a document relating to Israeli national security that has been drafted by the Arab summit without having the right to change a single word?

This approach, as presented by the most important formulator of Saudi foreign policy, projects a sense of superiority and disdain, and broadcasts a clear intent to bring Israel to its knees, to deny it security and return it to the 1948 borders that all agree are not defensible (“Auschwitz borders”, according to the late Abba Eban). The Arab desire to tear away the Old City of Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish people for 3,000 years, essentially reflects an Islamic refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish religion and expresses the belief that Islam emerged to replace Judaism rather than coexist with it. (Incidentally, according to this approach, Christianity too lost its role after the arrival of Islam.)

It’s my sense that the intention behind the API, as presented in this discussion by its originator, is to create an irreversible situation in which Israel has given up its territorial assets, following which all or some of the Arabs will find excuses for not delivering on their part of the deal. They might cite the “non-return” of demilitarized zones separating Israel and Syria prior to 1967 or of land north of Gaza where the moshav Nativ HaAsara is now located, or some aspect of the refugee problem that is impossible to solve in accordance with refugee demands.

At a time when voices are increasingly heard in Egypt calling for cancelling the peace treaty, Israel has no long-term guarantee that

peace, however cold and partial, will survive the revolution there. Jordan's fate, too, is uncertain in view of the wave of unrest sweeping through the Arab world.

Israel would have to be clearly suicidal to enter today into a process that enables the establishment of another Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria after we already have a terror state in Gaza that torments Israel with rockets and missiles made there or smuggled from Iran. There is no country in the world that can guarantee that the Arab League commitment to recognize Israel will be honored by a new Palestinian state, particularly if it is again taken over by Hamas through elections as in January 2006 or a military coup as in June 2007. Will the armies of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Libya come to the territory of a Palestinian state to disperse the Izzedine al-Qassam brigades or confiscate missiles and mortars from Islamic Jihad?

If the Arab League, led by its summit, wants to persuade Israel to accept the API, it must treat Israel as a negotiating partner and engage in serious discussions of conditions for peace. Once agreement is reached concerning the outline and phases of the peace process, we can discuss the substance of peace. But the words of Mohammad al-Zulfa, spoken to the Arab nation, point to a different outcome: the Saudis and the Arab summit have no intention save the defeat of Israel without a fight, by means of false premises that harbor no commitment to real implementation.

In view of the sorry state of the Arab world today, with key Arab states confronting unprecedented challenges, Israel and the world must wait patiently until the smoke clears. Only then will it be possible to discuss negotiations—nothing less—in which Israel might concede strategic assets.—*Published April 13, 2011*

The best policy alternative for Israel

by Alex Mintz and Yosi Ganel

A study we carried out at the IDC-Herzliya Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy examined comparatively policy alternatives for the government of Israel with regard to the peace process. We found the Arab Peace Initiative, with five key reservations, to be the optimal policy for Israel.

The study utilized a computerized scenario analysis and compared the following six policy alternatives:

1. halting peace talks with the Palestinians;
2. continuing direct talks with the Palestinians;
3. unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank while keeping the large settlement blocs, plus security arrangements;
4. negotiating with Syria;
5. accepting the API as is; and
6. accepting the API with the following five reservations: the Palestinian state should be demilitarized, with security arrangements; Palestinian refugees would be allowed to return only to the Palestinian state (and/or only a small number would be allowed to live in Israel); terror against Israel would be immediately halted and terrorist infrastructure would be dismantled; Jerusalem would be discussed separately; the large settlement blocs would be preserved as part of a land swap.

These six policy alternatives were assessed across six decision criteria that enter into the calculus of decisions of the Israeli government in the short-term and in the long run: security, economic considerations, demographic factors, regional implications, US-Israel relations, and standing in the international community.

The methodology used in this study is based on the Applied Decision Analysis procedure. It allows for the computerized analysis of policy implications and weights assigned to various dimensions, and sensitivity analysis. This method, which was developed by the first author at Yale University, is used by researchers and analysts for the analysis of decisions, problems and dilemmas across the globe.

Based on the ADA methodology, each decision dimension was assigned a weight between 1 and 10. The weight represents the importance of the dimension in the calculus of decision of the Israeli government. For example, the security dimension was assigned a weight of 9-10, given the importance of this dimension to policymakers in Israel. But the “standing in the international community” dimension scored only 2, because it is much less significant to policymakers.

The implications of each alternative on the different dimensions received a rating between (-10) and (+10), according to the influence of the alternative on the dimension for Israel. For example, if Israel chooses to adopt the Arab Peace Initiative with the five reservations listed above, it is reasonable to assume that the security situation will improve. Therefore the security dimension for this alternative got the grade of +2. It did not score a higher grade because Iran will still try to influence both Hizballah and Hamas to spoil any agreement.

The results of the comparative analysis of scenarios, alternatives and dimensions of a range of policy alternatives for Israel across the six decision dimensions found that the best policy option for Israel is accepting the API with five reservations. This alternative received the highest score overall and by a wide margin and is the only alternative to score well on almost all dimensions. The second best alternative was “continuing the direct talks with the Palestinians”, followed by “unilateral withdrawal”, and “direct talks with Syria”. The worst policy option for Israel is “halting the negotiations with the Palestinians”. In addition, “accepting the API as is” is unacceptable due to the low score of the plan on the security and demographic dimensions.

It should be pointed out that a comprehensive sensitivity analysis that includes varying the importance of the dimensions and the implications of alternatives on the six dimensions did not change our main findings.

Another insight of our analysis is that peace talks with both the Palestinians and Syria are preferable to negotiations on each track separately. While the costs are enormous, the benefits from following the API prescription of comprehensive peace are potentially very big for Israel.

In conclusion, we found that the optimal alternative for Israel is declaring that Israel accepts the API conditionally with five reservations. These could be spelled out in an official letter by the government of Israel to accompany the formal declaration, just as Israel did with its reservations to the roadmap.

To counter the Iranian threat and Iran's ambitions for regional expansion and hegemony, there is a need for the United States to form a formal or informal coalition with Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and the Palestinian Authority. The basis for this alliance is the Arab Peace Initiative with reservations.—*Published November 24, 2010*

Accept with minor interpretations

by Yossi Alpher

There is a certain formalistic justification in Israel's standoffish attitude toward the Arab Peace Initiative. After all, the API was never seriously "marketed" to Israel. The concluding paragraph of the API asks every relevant institution in the international community to "pursue the necessary contacts to gain support for this initiative"—everyone, that is, except Israel itself, the target of the initiative. At one point a few years ago, in response to protest over this lacuna, the Arab League sent the Egyptian and Jordanian foreign ministers to Jerusalem to present the API. But they visit Israel on occasion anyway and this gesture left no impression.

Imagine the Israeli public response had King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia asked to come and present the API to the Knesset. The late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat demonstrated in 1977 how readily Israeli public opinion can be turned around by a sincere, hands-on Arab approach.

Still, given the revolutionary nature of the API, these formalistic protestations cannot excuse the absence of any official Israeli response. There should have been one long ago. Israel has every reason to officially accept an Arab offer of comprehensive normal relations and security in return for peace agreements based on the 1967 lines. It should attach three relatively minor "interpretations" to its acceptance.

First, Israel should accept the principle of the 1967 lines, but with agreed land swaps. This would reflect the progress already made in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations: both sides have agreed to the principle. It would also suggest an acceptable formula for negotiating the territorial gaps between Israel and Syria generated by the Syrian demand for the 1967 lines as opposed to Israel's potential readiness to return to the international border between the two countries. That the API stipulates

the 1967 lines for Syria as well as the Palestinians reflects the influence of Damascus' unreasonable demand to ignore a well-delineated international boundary. Moreover, in the case of Israel-Syria, there is no clear record of the 1967 lines, which reflected land-grabs by both sides inside demilitarized territory. So the Israeli "interpretation" in this regard should not seem unreasonable.

Second, Israel needs to stipulate its interpretation of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, which is cited by the API as the basis of a just and agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee issue. Back in 1949, the Arab UN members voted against 194, precisely because it did not stipulate a specific "right of return" of all refugees. Since then, the Palestinians have successfully recast 194 and persuaded many quarters in the international community that it does indeed offer a comprehensive right of return. Israel should cite its understanding that 194 refers only to the original refugees and not succeeding generations, that it never mentions a "right of return", and that it conditions return upon Israeli agreement and a willingness on the part of a refugee to live at peace in Israel.

Only a few tens of thousands of the original refugees are still alive. Israel has in any case frequently offered over the years to compensate all refugees and allow a few to return based on humanitarian considerations. Since the API conditions a refugee solution on Israeli agreement, it obviously leaves room to discuss Israel's interpretation of 194. But better to place that interpretation up front when Israel accepts the API. This is also the place for Israel to add that it expects the Arab countries to discuss compensation for the hundreds of thousands of their Jewish citizens who fled and came to Israel in 1948 and thereafter as a consequence of Arab hostility to Israel's existence.

Finally, Israel should cite an offer made on at least one occasion by then Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit to implement the API in phases that correspond with phases in Israel-Arab peacemaking. As Abul Gheit apparently recognized, rewarding Israel with aspects of normalization and security in return for a partial peace agreement or for agreement with one Arab neighbor prior to the others would provide incentives for further peacemaking and persuade the Israeli public that the API is a serious offer.

Because I believe the API is indeed a serious offer, I hope the Arab League finds a way to respond to the kind of Israeli acceptance described above, if and when it happens. Unfortunately, under current circumstances, Israel's pro-settler government is not likely to accept the

API with these or any other “interpretations”. And in view of the turmoil in the Arab world, the Arab League will in any case probably not be in a position to respond or reciprocate for some time to come.—*Published April 18, 2011*

The IPI, a pragmatic yes to the API

by Yuval Rabin and Koby Huberman

Since 2000, the peace process has been oscillating between stops and starts. Whether or not Israelis and Palestinians resume talks for another 90 days, and definitely if talks fail, it’s time to face the inevitable conclusion: permanent status agreements are unlikely to be achieved through bilateral negotiations without a regional context, either as a cementing element or as fallback. A new approach is therefore needed to ensure that the process reaches its destination while the impact of the spoilers is gradually minimized.

In 2002, the Arab states presented the Arab Peace Initiative as their “end game” vision, introducing a transformational shift toward a comprehensive, regional and “future-based” process rather than a fragmented, bilateral and incremental one. Like many Israelis, we perceived this as a historic event. Still, we do not intend to explain the difficulties Israeli governments have had with the API or why it was not accepted. Instead, we propose that Israel respond with a pragmatic “yes” by presenting its own parallel “end game” vision—as an Israeli Peace Initiative or IPI rather than an attempt to “fix” the API.

The IPI should articulate Israel’s own long-term vision, to be achieved after successful and gradual implementation of all permanent status agreements. Publishing such an IPI would demonstrate a transformational shift in Israel’s strategy, realizing that only by ending the regional Arab-Israel conflict will Israel achieve its fundamental interests, attain its security goals and eliminate existential threats. Such a vision should also demonstrate that these long-term fundamental interests (such as security, identity and acceptance in the region) are achievable in accordance with the API core concepts, with bridgeable gaps.

With that in mind, in 2008 we started to draft an IPI proposal, based on three principles: our interpretation of Israel’s genuine strategic interests;

our assumption that Israeli leaders will be ready to make “all possible concessions” only when they can show Israelis that this is “in return for the end of all conflicts”; and our determination to adopt existing proposals and solutions already negotiated in the past 19 years since Madrid, without reinventing the wheel.

The detailed IPI text will be published soon in English, Hebrew and Arabic; it contains four vision chapters, starting with regional end-of-conflict scenarios. The Israeli-Palestinian scenario is a viable Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders and one-on-one land swaps, Jerusalem as the home of two capitals and special arrangements in the holy basin, an agreed solution for the refugees inside the Palestinian state (with symbolic exceptions), mutual recognition of the genuine national identities of the two states as the outcome of negotiations and not as a prerequisite, reiteration of the principles underlying Israel’s 1948 declaration of independence regarding civic equality for its Arab citizens, and long-term security arrangements with international components.

The Israeli-Syrian end-of-conflict scenario is based on phased withdrawals from the Golan Heights to finally reach the 1967 borders with one-on-one land swaps, coupled with tight security arrangements to curb terrorists and paramilitary organizations. Regarding Lebanon, the scenario articulates mainly security arrangements, as international borders have already been established. The other three IPI components present regional security mechanisms addressing common regional threats, a vision for regional economic development, and parallel evolution toward regional recognition and normal ties.

As we are just pragmatic businesspeople, we intentionally left many issues for the experts and diplomats, e.g., water, symbolic exceptional solutions for refugees in Israel and the impact of long-term permanent security arrangements on nuclear weapons in the region. For similar reasons, we are not in a position to suggest the exact diplomatic processes that will turn the API and IPI into actionable platforms and a synchronized process. However, in the past 18 months, we have shared the evolving IPI text with Arab figures in various forums and were encouraged to hear them welcoming the very fact that Israelis are responding to the API, regardless of the IPI’s precise language. When talking to them and Israeli experts, we presented our idea to form a regional framework agreement as a synthesis between the API and the IPI. In fact, the two initiatives could become “vision deposits” that provide a declaration of principles or alternatively a framework agreement.

The ideas in the IPI are not what we Israelis have been dreaming and hoping for, as they represent a major shift from our collective ideology. Accordingly, Israeli society will find them difficult to digest. But we believe Israeli society can face up to these challenges and that our democratic system will win, because the IPI captures the mutual sacrifices needed to end all conflicts and to achieve the true strategic interest of the State of Israel: a secure homeland for the Jewish people, enjoying full regional recognition.

We hope the IPI creates an intensified dialogue and some rethinking both in Israeli circles and the region. More importantly, 15 years after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, we hope to see brave regional and international leaders translate the API and IPI visions into practical and synchronized progress.—Published November 24, 2010

The best possible deal

by Saleh Abdel Jawad

On the night of June 10, 1967, in the wake of the Six-Day War, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was quoted as saying that he was waiting for a telephone call from Arab leaders. In other words, he expected an Arab initiative in which land would be exchanged for peace.

However, the telephone did not ring. That wasn't because the Arab answer was late. It was delivered in the Khartoum Arab League summit resolution of September 1, 1967 and became known as the "Three Nos": no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with it.

In this historic context, the endorsement of the Arab Peace Initiative by the Arab League summit in Beirut in March 2002 reflects a dramatic change in the traditional Arab world's position vis-a-vis Israel. It represents the best comprehensive package one could hope for given political constraints on both parties.

Unfortunately, the military operation in the Palestinian territories two days after the peace initiative's endorsement reflected the Israeli mainstream's "true" response to the Arab peace offer. It's only fair to note that this operation came after two deadly attacks against innocent

Israeli civilians in Netanya and Haifa, but this was not the real reason since such attacks were commonplace during the second intifada. The Israeli operation was mainly intended to brake the momentum of the initiative—and it succeeded.

But circumstances change and today Israel should not miss this opportunity. It should declare its willingness to accept the plan as a basis for Arab-Israel negotiations and begin a serious dialogue over its application. What might have been an advantage to Israel in the past is no longer the case today or for the future.

Israel should recognize the geopolitical-strategic changes that have occurred since 2002.

First, the United States' occupation and destruction of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime (brought about by pressure from Israel) have ironically changed the regional balance of power in favor of Iran, an enemy much, much tougher than the late regime of the Iraqi dictator.

Second, American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the deterioration of the US economy are seriously weakening Israel's main ally. While the Yishuv and Israel formerly succeeded at replacing one superpower with another (the United Kingdom with France and then the US), it's hard to imagine any real alternative to American power and supremacy.

Third, there is the rise of Hizballah and Syria after the 2006 Lebanon War, which was perceived in the Arab world as an Israeli defeat. While this is clearly an exaggeration, we can't but observe that what Israel succeeded in achieving in six days or six hours against three Arab armies in 1967 was unachievable in 33 days in Lebanon and 21 days in Gaza against several thousand combatants. The days of achieving decisive victory in a number of days seem to be gone forever.

Fourth, the strategic shift in Turkey's policies and alliances in the region means another significant weakening of Israel's position. A continuation of the conflict could lead in the long run to a new front against Israel composed of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon. In addition, Israel should not ignore the deterioration of its image within the international community. The unconditional support of some western leaders should not blind Israel from seeing its real position among the grassroots.

And finally, the continuation of the conflict has had a tremendous impact on Israel's soul and structure. It is now slipping toward an apartheid

system vis-a-vis its Arab population, empowering extreme religious fanaticism, and overseeing the destruction of its democratic system.

These interrelated changes result in only two choices for Israel: either to continue in endless wars with uncertain results, or to accept the Arab Peace Initiative as a basis for peace.—*Published November 24, 2010*

What peace process? What peace?

by As'ad AbuKhalil

With every new United States administration, especially toward the last year of the term of a US president, the talk about “Arab-Israeli peace” increases. Usually, people are invited to Washington, DC to attend a ceremony of speeches. Arab official expectations usually rise, while Israeli governments get accustomed to resisting any signs of US pressures. Pressures never come, but the perceptions of imminent US pressures are deliberately promoted to bring a level of enthusiasm from Arab official delegations.

It is high time to expose the obvious: there has not been a peace process since it started back in the early 1970s, with the Rogers Plan. It is usually forgotten that National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger scuttled the Rogers plan and Secretary of State William Rogers himself had to resign. What we call a “peace process” is no more than US political and diplomatic cover provided to Israel to give it time to achieve its objectives through war, occupation, and assassinations. The “peace process” was also used in the mid-1970s to give Anwar Sadat enough time to prepare for his trip to Jerusalem.

The long and unending duration of this peace process refutes assumptions about an urgent need (made by every US administration) to end once and for all the Arab-Israeli conflict. Usually in a president's second term, efforts by administrations intensify and offers are made to induce Israel to make minimum concessions, while Arab (usually Palestinian) negotiators are pressured and bullied into accepting humiliating conditions forced on them by the US. Yet, the conditions are typically too humiliating and well below the minimum standards of national consensus for any Palestinian leadership to accept. And even when a Palestinian leadership inches toward accepting the humiliating conditions, like the Arafat leadership in

the Taba negotiations toward the very end of the Clinton second term, the Israeli government makes it clear it won't agree to the minimum demands of the Palestinian delegation.

The Arab-Israel conflict is not at a crossroads. It has not ended. Yet, supporters of Israel want to believe that the weakening position of the Palestinian leadership (in the rival camps) is enough to predict the demise of the Palestinian national movement. *New York Times* Jerusalem bureau chief Ethan Bronner recently wrote that "the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been largely drained of deadly violence in the past few years." Bronner may have not noticed, but Palestinians—civilians and combatants—are being hunted down regularly by Israeli gunfire. Yet, Israel may feel gratified because the Palestinian house is divided and a Palestinian party (the Fateh movement) is now largely funded, armed, and supported by supporters of Israel in the US and European Union.

Of course, Arab governments never cease to take US peace seriously—more than a bit too seriously. Ever since the King Fahd Plan (later modified to be re-produced as a Reagan Plan), Saudi Arabia has thrown its weight and money behind US diplomatic efforts in the region, imposing its standards for Arab-Israel peace on Arab governments. The so-called Arab peace plan is a culmination of Saudi efforts to control the Arab state system on behalf of the US in order to facilitate US foreign policy initiatives and to atone for Saudi sins prior to 9/11. It seems that no one is taking it seriously, except the Saudi king and his media propagandists. The Saudi government hoped for some western attention, but none was displayed. The Saudi government even paid for expensive one page ads in key western newspapers, but they were ignored. Now, the Saudi government is relegated to repeating its mantra about the need for basing future talks on this initiative. As for the Arab public, it never identified with that peace initiative. It was seen, rightly, as a calculation of an Arab government desperate for US support and approval.

Israel has a different agenda: its agenda is to stick to that classic Zionist formula: that the Arabs only understand the language of force. As Hannah Arendt observed back in 1951: "All hopes to the contrary notwithstanding, it seems as though the ONE argument the Arabs are incapable of understanding is force."

Israel had a chance to reach an unfair and unjust deal with Yasser Arafat. Instead, it fought him at every corner. Zionism is based on a firm belief in the fundamental inferiority of the (Arab) enemy in every facet. Even the nationalist impulse was ignored by the Zionists in dealing with Arabs. The Arab-Israel conflict is one that will not be solved except in a bloody

and total war—one that may come on gradually. The performance of the Israeli army in the face of hundreds of Hizballah volunteers in 2006 may point to a direction that is way out of favor for Israel. Despite the fulfillment of the Zionist dream in the Holy Land, Israel's years may be numbered. Peace may come then, depending on the way the victors fashion their new political state.—*Published November 24, 2010*

ARAB REVOLUTIONS AND THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

The API in thrall to the Arab spring

by Nathalie Tocci

The Arab Peace Initiative, first endorsed at the Beirut summit in 2002, was born of a specific context. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, what was to become the “moderate” Arab camp was intent on asserting its credentials to the West. Offering Israel full normalization of relations in return for an end of Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights and an (unspecified) “just” solution to the refugee problem was an unprecedented move.

So historic an offer was it that, despite the abysmal lack of concrete action that followed, the API has remained on the table. It was re-endorsed by the Arab League in 2007, is ostensibly part of the Obama administration’s Middle East diplomacy and has also been repeatedly supported by the European Union and the Quartet.

The world in 2011 looks very different from that of 2002. The Arab world is undergoing profound change. Decades-long dictatorships of the likes of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt have been swept away by a tide of popular mobilization and tacit military support. Neighboring Libya is in the midst of war, and while a return to the status quo ante under Muammar Gaddafi is difficult to contemplate, the alternative remains extremely murky.

Further east, Bashar Assad’s regime in Syria trembles, and while it recognizes the need to move fast on political reforms, we have yet to see whether it too is already behind the curve. Likewise, the regimes in Bahrain and Yemen sit uneasily on the fence, as protests and violence rage on.

What then of the API in this profoundly transformed regional environment? In the short run, the API is likely to remain where it has been for years: shelved. The dust of the current revolts will take time to settle, and when it does, the challenges are daunting.

A singular characteristic of the Arab spring is its fundamentally domestic nature. Responses to youth unemployment, soaring food prices, rampant corruption, political repression and widespread human rights violations are the bread and butter of the protesters' demands. No burning foreign flags or Islamist slogans on the streets of Cairo, Tunis and elsewhere. This is not to say that the "Arab street" is oblivious to Palestine, still less that it is supportive of the foreign policies pursued hitherto by its regimes. It is simply to say that the nuts and bolts of the revolts are quintessentially domestic in nature. And it is with these domestic economic, social and political questions that future leaders will have to grapple.

Likewise, the international community will continue to be absorbed by these events and their aftermath. In Libya, even in the best of possible circumstances in which armed conflict soon comes to a close, the post-Gaddafi future remains a worrying black box. More broadly, the European Union will be deeply engaged in reorganizing its Mediterranean policies that have been rendered obsolete or, at the very least, in dire need of a serious rethink by events in the region. The United States, for its part, will be fully occupied by the Gulf and by the evolution of what Robert Springborg calls Egypt's "coupvolution". A clear signal of these international priorities is the relative international neglect of the recent disturbing re-escalation of violence in Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

But what about the long run? Much will depend, of course, on the balance sheet of the "Arab spring." Let us assume, for the sake of optimism, that tomorrow's Middle East will be more democratic (or less authoritarian) than that of previous decades. If the political stars were to align, the API's prospects might be rosy, or at least rosier.

Were Egypt to move in the direction of greater democratic accountability, we may well imagine that it could re-appropriate its lost mantle of Arab leadership in the Middle East. Cairo would probably revise its Palestinian policy, moving towards a genuine commitment to intra-Palestinian reconciliation and a less sanguine policy towards Hamas. Alongside this, it may feel sufficiently emboldened to dust the API off the shelf and actively work towards translating it into political reality. The Syrian regime may also change or be severely weakened by internal dissent. This might reduce Iranian leverage on the Arab world, lifting prospects for the API.

At some point in the, hopefully, not-too-distant future, the international community, led by the US, will also recast its energy on the Arab-Israeli peace process, currently derailed by Israeli obstinacy and a discredited

Palestine Liberation Organization leadership. Particularly if it wishes to stave off the current trend of unilateralism—through the Palestinian Authority’s drive for recognized statehood and Israeli threats of retaliation—the US may recommit to a more muscular mediation and find erstwhile and more effective (albeit more independent) allies in the Arab Middle East in this endeavor.

A final question mark regards Israel. To date, Israel’s reaction to the Arab spring has been marked by fear and retrenchment. Its mourning of Mubarak’s departure jarred with the rest of the world’s applause. Yet with time and introspection, Israel may come to realize that swimming against the tide of change in the region is not in its best interest. And there is no better anchor than the API to bring Israel into synch with its region and the world.—*Published April 6, 2011*

Saudi dilemmas and the API

by Madawi al-Rasheed

The Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by Saudi Arabia’s then-Crown Prince Abdullah (king since 2005) and announced during the Arab League summit in Beirut in 2002, is hard to resurrect amidst revolutions and protests in the region. Not only was the initiative a stillborn baby, but over time it became a corpse in need of a death ritual. We all know how important such rituals are for the living, but unfortunately, the illusion of peace persists while the reality attests that “no solution has become the solution”.

For a long time, championing the Palestinian cause with either the threat of war, large economic handouts, peace initiatives or even simple delusional rhetoric has been Arab dictators’ most favorite road to celebrity status. Turkey and Iran are the contest’s most recent arrivals. Unfortunately for Saudi Arabia’s king and other aspiring rulers, this road has become a dead end. Neither the Palestinians nor the Arab masses are impressed by previous performance.

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia proposed peace in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. He pressed for the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and called for a Palestinian state with Jerusalem

as its capital. Israel did not accept. Five years later, the initiative's revival in March 2007 did not bring tangible results.

The aging 87-year-old Saudi monarch is a king of transition. It will not be long before a new king, most probably from the small circle of the seven Sudayri princes, replaces him. This will not bring about major Saudi foreign policy shifts vis-a-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Saudi Arabia is not in a position to activate its involvement in conflict resolution at this time for several reasons.

Despite Saudi largesse, the country's influence has been shrinking in the Arab world. In Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, and more recently Egypt, the Saudi leadership lost acumen, long-established on the basis of sacred geography and black gold. More than any other Arab country, Saudi Arabia had a lot to lose as a result of Iran's rising influence in the region. Its equally aging foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, is looking frail and can hardly inspire confidence in a region that is experiencing a sudden political awakening triggered by youth bulges.

Since 2003, Saudi Arabia has lost all hope of bringing Iraq back to the Arab fold. Its involvement in the Iraqi elections proved futile in the face of Nour al-Maliki's new iron fist. When revolutions broke out in Tunisia and Egypt, Saudi Arabia became increasingly associated with a bygone era. Hosting one of the Arab world's most corrupt and brutal dictators, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, meant that Saudi Arabia had begun to be seen as a safe haven for deposed autocrats. Saudi Arabia lost a close ally when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak packed his suitcases and moved to Sharm al-Sheikh. The king was so devastated he offered to compensate Mubarak for the loss of US aid.

The country's relations with Syria have been fraught with suspicion and mistrust since Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006. When protests broke out in Deraa two weeks ago, Syrian sources alluded to a Saudi conspiracy against the regime in Damascus. Bashar al-Assad had called Arab leaders half men when they blamed Hizballah for the Lebanon conflagration. The Saudis went into a frenzy. Personal insults of this kind have a lasting impact on inter-Arab personalized politics. Saudi Arabia had always aspired, though unsuccessfully, to wean Syria off Iran's largesse.

Backing one Palestinian faction against another and remaining silent over the Israeli blockade of Gaza did little to endear the Saudi leadership to substantial sections of the Palestinian population. From the perspective of the Arab street, Turkey cared more about Palestinians than did the

Saudi king. Since the 1979 Camp David agreement, Saudi Arabia has aspired to replace Egypt as the main orchestrator of a different peace. With its aging leadership and fading diplomacy, it has stagnated and become more and more irrelevant to the persistent conflict.

Today Saudi Arabia is looking to consolidate its position, not on the shores of the Mediterranean, but on those of the Persian Gulf. It moved troops to the small island of Bahrain to save the ruling al-Khalifa family and crush a peaceful protest movement demanding more political rights. Its own Shiite and Sunni population is looking increasingly agitated and ready to engage in street protest.

As the Bahraini demonstrations were being crushed, a more deadly protest movement started in Yemen. Saudi Arabia has long supported the Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, but can no longer rest assured that he will remain in power. Saudi Arabia is facing external threats from its poor southern neighbor that has an armed population not so appreciative of Saudi interference in its affairs. From the Zaydi Huthis in the north to the separatists in the south, Yemenis have come to associate Saudi Arabia with meddling.

If the neighbors are troubled and troubling, the interior of the country is looking even bleaker. Inspired by the peaceful Egyptian pro-democracy movement, Saudi activists circulated more than two lengthy petitions calling for constitutional monarchy. Others called for the fall of the regime. Since March 11, the so-called “Day of Rage” organized by Saudi Facebook activists, the security sources have arrested more than 160 men and women, according to Human Rights Watch. Feeling the heat, the king distributed benefits worth \$36 billion. Heavy policing and threats of the wrath of God from mosque minarets ensured that the demonstrations failed. Yet the leadership remains on edge. It has resorted to a “wait and see” policy at home and is flexing its muscles against the Shiites of Bahrain.

The internal Saudi scene, coupled with major external challenges, will confine Saudi Arabia to a marginal role in resurrecting the API in the near future. The only external force that can make a difference in this ongoing conflict is in fact not Saudi Arabia, but a democratic Egypt. It may take several years to stabilize and return to its major regional role. But when it comes back, Egypt can make a difference, especially with a new political leadership untarnished by its contribution to the Israeli injustices inflicted on Palestinians.

In the long term, the obstacle remains the increasingly religious right-wing state of Israel. The growing “judaization” of the conflict means that crises persist as compromises disappear. It has never been easy to divide the sacred or share it, but political compromises are always possible.

If there is a change in Israeli internal politics towards more rationality and away from religious mystification, Palestinians and Israelis will have a better chance of reaching the conclusion that they alone can make a lasting peace. Neither the Saudis nor other external players can offer them what they cannot offer each other.

The “no solution solution” may not be a viable option in times of regional turmoil. These autocrats have lived off this conflict for too long. To wait for Egypt is also not an option. Under the revolutionary law of contagion that has taken the region by surprise, the Palestinian human crisis may erupt in the face of Israel at any moment. Saudi Arabia will not be relevant as it is busy expanding eastward towards the Gulf. Saudi Arabia has many dilemmas. At the moment, Palestine is not one of them. —*Published April 6, 2011*

Time for a positive Israeli response to the API

by Mark A. Heller

The upsurge of opposition to authoritarian rule, widely described as the “Arab spring,” has not been good for the forests. Ever since the first anti-regime demonstrators took to the streets of the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid in late December, the commentariat on things Middle Eastern has grown exponentially, and the print media—along with the blogosphere—have been inundated by a flood of commentary, analysis, prediction and prescription. Some of this has been insightful and knowledgeable, some has been informed (or deformed) by political agendas, some has been wishful thinking, and some has been sheer nonsense. But perhaps the clearest dividing line in this tsunami of words is between those commentators who admit that they don’t know how all this will play out and those who delude themselves into thinking that they do.

Of course, revolutions—if these are, indeed, revolutions—follow notoriously unpredictable paths. It is difficult, even in retrospect, to know how, why or by whom the attempts to overthrow existing orders were initiated. And it is impossible to extrapolate from unfolding events the course of these developments, that is, to predict whether regime change will actually come about and, if it does, in which Arab political systems that will happen, what sorts of successor regimes will emerge and whether they will differ in truly significant ways from their predecessors or else amount to little more than a change in the cast of leading characters.

Even this does not begin to exhaust the list of known unknowns, much less address the question of the unknown unknowns, so it is more than a bit presumptuous to trace any future connection between turmoil in Arab states and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All that can be said with some confidence is that Israel has been and will somehow continue to be injected into all of this, probably to its detriment.

This is not to say that enmity to Israel is in any meaningful sense a factor that precipitated or facilitated the Arab spring. It is to say, however, that in those states geographically closest to the Israeli-Palestinian arena, popular hostility to Israel is a sentiment that regime and/or opposition try to exploit in the unfolding contest between them, the most blatant example being Syrian President Bashar Assad's claim that demonstrations against his regime are part of an Israeli-directed plot to weaken and undermine Syria. Anti-Israel sentiment is also something that contending forces may try to leverage, if and when incumbent regimes are overthrown, in order to enhance their prospects in the ensuing struggle for power among them. Finally, and perhaps most ominously, successor regimes may be dominated by radical nationalist or Islamist forces ideologically committed to an aggressively anti-Israel policy even though the revolution they made or hijacked was not originally inspired by an anti-Israel agenda.

Israel therefore has a clear interest in removing itself completely from domestic Arab political conflicts. Of course, the only way that can happen is through a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and resolving the conflict peacefully is something that Israel cannot, by definition, do unilaterally. Israel could, however, take some actions that might lower whatever salience it has in the unfolding Arab spring and its aftermath. These actions might be grouped under the heading of public diplomacy by deed and word, whose main purpose would be to devalue the currency of anti-Israel rhetoric used by forces

on one side or the other of the barricades in the struggles associated with the Arab spring.

An example of Israeli public diplomacy by deed might be the off-promised dismantling of unauthorized outposts in the West Bank. The public diplomacy by word most likely to resonate would be a considered response to the Arab Peace Initiative that Israeli governments have hitherto ignored. This need not entail an unconditional acceptance of the API, because almost all Israelis have some reservations about some parts of it. But there is no reason why the Israeli government, rather than ignoring the API, should not declare that it has given it careful consideration, views it in a positive light, and believes that it is a constructive basis for further discussions that it desires to pursue with the authors of the initiative.

Of course, such a declaration would leave unanswered some important questions, particularly about with whom the potential of the initiative might be authoritatively explored. Nor would it guarantee that the dormant discourse of peace in the region would be immediately reenergized. Nevertheless, the mere injection of such a declaration into the public domain might at least reduce the potency of anti-Israel rhetoric in the Arab spring and whatever season will follow it, if not among those in the Arab body politic unalterably opposed to peace, then at least among those disposed to coexistence but brought to believe that the obstacle is Israel's unalterable opposition to peace. In the present circumstances, that prospect, alone, justifies the activation of a component of Israeli public diplomacy that has been absent for far too long.—*Published April 6, 2011*

An empowering Arab peace plan

by Akram Baker

The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 was a far-reaching document laying out an offer of comprehensive peace with Israel in exchange for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine. At the time, during the dark years of the Bush administration, it caused a bit of hand-wringing among Israelis afraid that the world would begin to see Israel for what it was: an illegal occupying power resistant to real peace. However, there was really no cause for concern: neither the United States, the international

community, nor illegitimate Arab rulers were willing to take the steps necessary to implement the plan.

Nine years have passed since then, and the peace plan is even more irrelevant than ever. But its irrelevance is materially different now, with the entire region in the throes of an unprecedented democratic upheaval. Massive popular demonstrations have already forced the ouster of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and Tunisian strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Regimes in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria are shooting their own people in a desperate bid to put down rebellions. While this has caused wholesale panic among the region's despots from Morocco to the Gulf, its effect on Israel is enormous.

The reasons are simple. Israel has always been on the wrong side of history, choosing military occupation instead of peace. It has always been a quiet and not-so-quiet supporter of the Arab "strongman", greatly preferring dictators to democracy. This has conveniently provided it with ammunition in the half-baked claim of being the "only democracy in the Middle East" but also has directly supported the crushing of all Arab public opinion and pressure.

In 2002, the Arab world was reeling from the fallout of the al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11, looking for some way to get off the world's most-despised list. The Arabs listened to their masters in Washington and threw out a bone.

But 2011 is a completely changed world. The "Arab spring" began spontaneously when a vegetable seller in a small town in Tunisia, humiliated and manhandled by security agents, decided to publicly immolate himself, sparking the wide-reaching intifada by the disaffected Arab masses against their leaders. For the first time in history, the Arab peoples have taken their fate into their own hands. It is important to note that the aforementioned regimes had always used the issue of Palestine as a convenient excuse to oppress their people. Feigning concern over the plight of Palestinians, the Arab regimes have consistently co-opted "The Cause" to leverage security and economic measures. After the upheavals in Tunisia and especially Egypt, this *causis belli* for repression is no longer valid.

Interestingly enough, the rallying cry of freedom for Palestine is more or less absent in the tumult underway in the region. This should not be seen as an abandonment of the Palestinian cause, but as a sign that the populations in the Arab world are thoroughly sick and tired of their illegitimate rulers. The people are clamoring for true democratic change

and have shown themselves willing to face down brutal repression. Most of all, they have shaken off their fear (like the peoples of Eastern Europe in 1989) of their regimes.

For Israel, the idea of Arab democracy is frightening. It is messy, and democratic countries do not accept diktats from foreign powers. The API never threatened the Israeli occupation because Israel was 100 percent sure that it was never meant to be implemented. Therefore, Israel ignored it and continued to entrench its occupation on an unprecedented scale.

It has been said that the Arab uprisings of 2011 are a death knell for the Middle East peace process. This is nothing short of—at best—willful ignorance. The so-called peace process was dead and gone a long time ago. (And this includes the API of 2002.) In its place, after a period of allowing democracy to settle in (which could take five to ten years and perhaps include violence), the Arab countries will be in a position of increased leverage vis-a-vis both Israel and the West. This will ultimately lead to progress on the peace front because the nations in question and their elected leaders will be sovereign, independent entities that focus on their national interests and not only the interests of the corrupt few.

The Israeli leadership (and the international community) is well aware that for Israel to gain peace it must end its occupation of Palestine. The changes taking place in the Arab world may just force Israel to make a stark choice: make peace or pay the price of failure. With the power of democracy behind them, a new API (maybe of 2016?) will not only declare the willingness to make peace, but have the clout and legitimacy to make it happen.—*Published April 6, 2011*

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The *Bitterlemons Guide to the Arab Peace Initiative* is a comprehensive examination of the peace proposal made by the Arab League in March 2002. In this compilation of 65 short essays, leading thinkers and politicians in the Arab world, Israel and beyond examine the text line-by-line for meanings and possibilities and explore the initiative's strengths, weaknesses and broad ramifications.

