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The Arab Peace Initiative: An Instrument for Peace

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June 2010

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Abstract

There is so much bitterness buried in Middle East belligerency that a shift in the political landscape to one that embraces peace has become almost inconceivable. That must change. This paper argues that the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 brings a new dimension to the negotiating table on the Arab-Israeli front. It offers Israel recognition and normal relations with 22 Arab nations in exchange for a withdrawal to the 1967 lines from all territory occupied to allow for a viable Palestinian state; a partition of Jerusalem, which would serve as a capital to both the Palestinians and the Israelis; and a negotiated, workable solution to the issue of the Palestinian right of return. There is a stronger chance for peace to prevail if it lies within a comprehensive framework, which the Arab Peace Initiative provides. The healing process for the Middle East may take longer, but it is vital to seek to attend to the wound holistically rather than aggravate it further.

“For our part, we shall continue to work for the new dawn when all the Children of Abraham and their descendants are living together in the birthplace of their three great monotheistic religions, a life free from fear, a life free from want – a life in peace.” King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan, March 24, 1995

Introduction

Over the years, peace has often been rendered a reluctant visitor to the Middle East. Now, the time is ripe for the Middle East to reconcile itself with the realities of a permanent peace and move towards a centrist course to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. A prolonged avoidance of final status issues will only further entrench political stagnation, increase radicalisation and mute the voices of moderates. This crossroads at which the Middle East peace process finds itself will either fork into a dismal abyss or foster a new positive era in the region's history. Here is where the Arab Peace Initiative enters the political script. Both symbolic and historic, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 puts forward a comprehensive peace plan that is unprecedented in its inclusion of Israel and unparalleled in its strategic outlook for the advancement of a secure and peaceful Middle East region.

This paper argues that the Arab Peace Initiative represents a framework for a pragmatic approach to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as it creates the contours of a comprehensive regional peace that is inclusive and sustainable. Moreover, it provides a long-term regional security net for Israelis, Palestinians and effectively the Arabs in an effort to counter the rise of the radical right on all sides and consequently strengthen subscribers to the moderate centre.

This essay also highlights the centrality of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle as the core issue of tension in the Middle East and argues that it must be dealt with primarily for any general regional accord to materialise. It is beyond the scope of this essay to delve into the intricacies of the Israeli-Syrian or Israeli-Lebanese disputes; instead it will focus on the significance of Palestinian-Israeli tensions for resolution of the conflict.

In order to elucidate this argument further, this essay will, first, outline what the peace initiative entails; second, delineate its core substance by explaining initially what it asks of Israel and subsequently what the Arabs offer in return; third, highlight the implications of the demise of this proposal on the region; and finally, propose recommendations to enhance its marketability and facilitate its adoption as a key instrument for ensuring a durable and permanent peace.

The Arab Peace Initiative: Interpreting the Text

Although the vision for an all-encompassing resolution of hostilities was put forward by King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz in the Fez Plan of 1980¹, by King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan in the 1980s and in 1998², and by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2001, its essence began to emerge more formally in early 2002. During an interview with then Crown Prince Abdullah, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman encouraged him to put his plan forward. To what extent Friedman expedited the Saudi king's articulation of this concept to the Arabs and then to the world remains vague. However, it was from that foetal idea that a new vision to renovate the region was architected by the Arabs.

The Arab Peace Initiative (API) was formally birthed at the Beirut Arab League Summit on 28 March 2002, when Arab nations offered Israel full recognition, security and comprehensive peaceful relations in return for its withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied in June 1967.³ Such was the regional support for the API that it was reiterated again in 2007⁴ at the Riyadh Arab Summit, and it continues to withstand the political pressure on it despite much digression in the Middle Eastern political landscape since.

The proposed peace plan provides a long-term strategic vision for a regional framework for peace. Prior to its endorsement, there was an opinion amongst the Arabs that there were no incentives that would make the Israelis compromise and, realistically, none that the Palestinians could offer.⁵ Therefore, the viewpoint was such that to ensure a lasting peace, a framework must be established that incorporated all Arab states in a guarantee of Israel's security, rather than placing that burden solely on the Palestinians.⁶ Lone bilateral efforts had failed to produce a break-through in the negotiating process; therefore, what was needed was a blue-print for a collective vision of peace, as it was recognised that all Middle East players had a stake in supporting a long-term solution.

1 Michel Cousins, 'Of kings and diplomacy,' Arab News, 20 April, 2010.

2 Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008),.

3 Text: Arab Peace Plan of 2002. BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1844214.stm.

4 Rex Brynen, 'The Past as Prelude? Negotiating the Palestinian Refugee Issue,' Chatham House (2008):8.

5 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):9.

6 Ibid.

Text

It is first important to delineate what the terms are for the joint offer of peace proposed by the Arab peace plan. The API states the following as part of its requests of 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:
 - a. Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of June 4, 1967 as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.
 - b. Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian Refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.⁷
 - c. 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.⁸

The introductory sentence elucidating the Arab states' acknowledgement that an impartial peace serves Israel's interests as well as their own is significant. By acknowledging that both sides need to work towards resolving the conflict in a manner that addresses their joint needs, they recognise for the first time that Israeli strategic security should also be preserved.

The API then calls for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab land based on the June 1967 lines including the Golan Heights as well as the remaining Lebanese territories, namely the Chebaa farms (as stated in UN Resolution 242)⁹. Hence, it moves towards solving the problem under a multilateral umbrella whilst simultaneously addressing individual bilateral needs.

7 UN General Assembly Resolution 194, Article 11, stipulates that the Palestinian refugees have a right to return to their homeland should they wish to do so and should be compensated for loss or damage to property.

8 Text: Arab Peace Plan of 2002. BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1844214.stm.

9 UN Resolution 242 of November 1967 stipulates the following: '(i) withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force'.

Second, it calls for an 'agreed upon' resolution to the Palestinian Refugee Problem¹⁰ in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194. This has been a major sticking point for many critics of the API, who believe the reference to Resolution 194 is problematic. Contrary to some depictions of this clause as having 'enshrined a Palestinian "right of return" to Israel',¹¹ the wording of the clause was modified to make it more palatable to the Israelis. The use of the expression 'agreed upon' renders the aforementioned argument invalid, and, furthermore, demonstrates that there is room for flexibility here that does not place one party's interests over the others' flat out.

Third, it states that Israel should agree to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 lines and maintains that East Jerusalem would be its capital. This will effectively end the occupation and allow for a Palestinian state that can build its institutions, be viable and secure and co-exist alongside Israel. The issue of East Jerusalem is particularly emotive and negotiation on a multilateral level must be pursued given its international significance.

Land for Peace

It is crucial to comprehend here that, from an Arab perspective, a peace without a return of land to the Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese cannot be envisioned.¹² Acknowledging the failure of incremental steps, Marwan Muasher, the former Jordanian foreign minister, aptly states that the 'gradual approach to peace-making has been exhausted'.¹³ Therefore, it is necessary to draw out the bigger issues, agree that they must be addressed and move on to the specifics later at two-pronged talks. The API presents the 1967 lines as the broad-based borders of a future Palestinian state and the basis upon which Arabs can envision an unravelling of a comprehensive peace deal. Furthermore, it must be a package-deal including all stakeholders as the short-lived bilaterals have not thus far demonstrated progress in achieving progress. However, some Israeli commentators perceive full withdrawal to the 1967 (the 'Green Lines') as unfeasible, and believe the Arab states must take into account changes on the ground over the last four decades.¹⁴ The Arab response to this is that Israel cannot dictate unilaterally the extent of its disengagement but must also take into account that these parameters must be mutually settled.¹⁵ Hence,

10 According to UNRWA, the official definition of Palestinian refugees are those "people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict." This definition also includes the descendants of the refugees registered in 1948 which at present number around 4.7 million.

11 Joshua Teitelbaum, 'Arab Peace Initiative: A Primer and Future Prospects', Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (2009):3, <http://www.jcpa.org/text/Arab-Peace-Initiative.pdf>

12 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):14.

13 Marwan Muasher, 'The Initiative still stands', Ha'aretz, 15 August 2008.

14 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):12.

15 Ibid.

flexibility must be shown by both parties that can assuage concerns, namely, that only very specific settlements will remain and that in return Palestinians will receive adequate compensation of land not only in volume but also in value.¹⁶

The continuation of the occupation will merely serve to constantly jab at Israel's security, and unilateral actions will not bring about long-term solutions. Some Israelis argue that every time there is a withdrawal, such as from parts of South Lebanon in 2000 and from Gaza in 2005, they are rewarded with rockets. However, this view does not acknowledge that in order to attain security, the terms of withdrawal must be negotiated and transferred to an authority. Gaza is a case in point: a power vacuum followed Israel's unilateral withdrawal, with detrimental effects for both the Israelis and the Palestinians. This was not due to the disengagement per se, but to the fact that the withdrawal was undertaken in a manner that not only lacked strategic vision but also did not seek any cooperation or guidance from the Palestinian national authorities.

Right of Return

For the Palestinians, Israelis and host Arab countries, the issue of the right of return of refugees is a political minefield on which parties must tread carefully. It deals with delicate and conflicting perceptions of historical accounts and ingrained beliefs¹⁷ regarding the division of Palestine and Israel's emergence, resulting in the predicament of displaced refugees with aspirations of a 'right of return' at loggerheads with the demographic defensiveness of Israel.¹⁸ There were a number of attempts to bridge the disparities in the positions held by the Israelis and Palestinians on final status matters in 2000, when the issue of refugees was put forward for the first time. The most prominent of these was the covert 'Stockholm channel' assisted by the Swedes and Americans in May 2000.¹⁹ These efforts ended in deadlock. Whilst there was talk of the return of refugees to a future Palestinian state, to Israel, resettlement in host or alternative countries and compensation, the Israelis rejected the creation of a space to allow some of them to go back to Israel and would only accept a limited or token number.²⁰

In talks in 2008 between Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President, and Ehud Olmert, the then Israeli prime minister, there were conflicting reports on whether Olmert had agreed in principle to the right of return. In a Washington Post article in May 2009, Abbas stated that there was such an agreement between the two leaders. Olmert later denied this, claiming that his statements were based on

16 Ibid.

17 Rex Brynen, 'The Past as Prelude? Negotiating the Palestinian Refugee Issue', Chatham House (2008):2.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p.5.

20 Ibid.

humanitarian premises.²¹ The Palestinians reasserted that they would accept a limited number returning to Israel but maintained that the Israelis should accept the concept in principle.²² The Palestinians insist that there must be recognition of 'moral responsibility' by Israel for the Palestinian exodus of 1947-1949, whereas Israelis fault the Arabs for the state of affairs in 1948.²³

Adding to the complexity of this mix is the involvement of the Arab host countries who have accommodated these refugees for many years. Particularly in the case of Lebanon and Jordan, taking in all the stakeholders' interests makes the issue of 'right of return' a more difficult and challenging aspect to be resolved in a final settlement. A secondary article in the text of the API explicitly addresses the concerns of the host Arab countries directly. Inserted at the insistence of Syria and Lebanon, the clause states that the API discards 'any forms of Palestinian patriation, which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries'.²⁴ Lebanon has repeatedly warned against such measures, which it perceives as an instigator of major instability in Beirut due to the volatility of its refugee camps. The Jordanians, having hosted the highest number of refugees, assert that their 'absorption capacity has been totally exhausted' and hence other states must also accept and share the burden by accepting a role and recognising their responsibilities.²⁵ Furthermore, there is always a fear amongst Jordanians that the extreme Israeli right will invoke the so-called 'Alternative homeland option' (al-Watan al-Badil), which is understandably rejected by the Jordanians as it stipulates that the Palestinians should be transferred to Jordan and patriated there, negating the concept of a Palestinian state and disregarding Jordan's sovereignty. Resettlement, compensation and state compensation continue to complicate the eventual settlement of this imperative issue.

The API addresses the multi-faceted dimension to its resolution, the refugee issue by placing the term 'just solution' at the forefront. The proposal asserts that it must be addressed, first, in a manner that Israel will consent to deal with. Second, it stipulates that once that is established, the mechanism for how it will be solved will be mutually 'agreed upon' by the Israelis and Palestinians as well as the host countries. Furthermore, the reference to UN Resolution 194 here was taken from an Israeli standpoint as to mean a categorical pledge to accommodate a rigid pledge to the 'right of return' which is inaccurate. In actuality, it is far more flexible, as the wording considered the previously used lexicon in the Clinton Parameters²⁶ and

21 'Tipping Point? Palestinians and the Search for a New Strategy', *International Crisis Group Middle East Report*, no. 95 (2010): 4.

22 Rex Brynen, 'The Past as Prelude? Negotiating the Palestinian Refugee Issue', Chatham House (2008):2.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 8-9.

25 Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Washington, DC, Jordan's Foreign Policy, <http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/aboutjordan/fp3.shtml>

26 The Clinton Parameters were an attempt by US President Bill Clinton in December 2000, after the failure of the Camp David talks, to create new parameters for peace and tackled final status issues of borders, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem. In principle both parties agreed to the deal but had reservations.

Taba talks as opposed to an unyielding claim to what the parameters of the 'return' would entail, and the reference to the resolution was favoured by the Saudis, Jordanians and Palestinians.²⁷ The wording of the API takes into account all stakeholders interests in order to see where they may converge with respect to UN Resolution 194.

Jerusalem

Another highly contentious issue addressed in the API is the dispute over the Holy City of Jerusalem, which is revered by both the Palestinians and Israelis as their capital. As Yossi Sarid rightly states, 'the fact is and always will be that this city is holy to everyone - such is its blessing and its curse'.²⁸ A city whose history has seen much strife, it symbolically brings people of the three monotheistic faiths together but politically has driven them apart. Of equal status to Jews, Christians and Muslims, its symbolic value does not only touch upon those residing within its borders but also to adherents of the three faiths dwelling all over the world. In 1948, Jerusalem was divided into East and West, the former to be controlled by Jordan and the latter by Israel; this situation endured until 1967.²⁹ In the Six-Day War, Israel occupied East Jerusalem and began its Judaization in order to incorporate it into Israel and unite the city.³⁰ However, Israeli pursuit of a policy aimed at unifying the city as its 'undivided capital' violates international law and remains unrecognised internationally. The crux of any settlement on Jerusalem is dependent on the realisation of East Jerusalem as the future Palestinian states' capital, assuring access to Jewish holy sites, assuaging Israeli security fears³¹ and the recognition of West Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

A major hurdle to reaching a consensus on Jerusalem is that events on the ground anticipate a highly contentious future, as the fragmentation of the city continues.³² Jewish settlements have sprouted over much of East Jerusalem making its disentanglement from its Western half much more complicated and, hence, its realisation as the future Palestinian state's capital even more so. The Jerusalem municipality has favoured housing policies that accommodate ultra-religious Jewish communities at the expense of Arab Christian and Muslim Jerusalemites. Even Western Jerusalem has been affected negatively as secular Israelis are finding it hard to reside in the city and are moving out given the political tensions³³ a disparity that

27 Rex Brynen, 'The Past as Prelude? Negotiating the Palestinian Refugee Issue', Chatham House (2008):9.

28 Yossi Sarid, 'For Jerusalem, a response to Elie Wiesel', Ha'aretz, 18 April 2010.

29 Mick Dumper and Wendy Pullan, 'Jerusalem: The Cost of Failure', *Chatham House Briefing Paper* (2010):2, <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/835/>

30 Menachem Klein, 'Jerusalem as an Israeli Problem-A Review of Forty Years of Israeli Rule Over Arab Jerusalem', *Israel Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2008):55.

31 Mick Dumper and Wendy Pullan, 'Jerusalem: The Cost of Failure', *Chatham House Briefing Paper* (2010):3, <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/835/>

32 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

embodies the weaving of religion and identity into the conflict. The ramifications of such a policy in the long term are dire, as it is tacitly transforming a national conflict into a religious one, with debilitating consequences in the long term.

In short, any discussion of Jerusalem's future status will involve three major considerations: first, to what extent the agreement will be based on a withdrawal to the 1967 lines and land exchanges indicated in the Clinton parameters; second, to what degree will four decades of metropolitan development in East Jerusalem (i.e. Arab house demolitions and settlement building) be taken into consideration, as well as Israeli desires to control Jewish holy places located in East Jerusalem; and third, what type of authority can be established that will safeguard the collective interests of the Palestinians, Israelis and international groups who have an interest in the access to and protection of sacred sites.³⁴ Furthermore, the reiteration of the long-established role of the custodians of the holy sites needs to be recognised, allowing them protected access in addition to potential international policing units with financial and logistical backing.³⁵ Conversely, any attempt to find a solution will be futile in the face of existing trends in the city as their consequences will spill far beyond Jerusalem's walls and onto the negotiating process.³⁶

The API explicitly calls for the establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of the future viable Palestinian state implying that when that should materialise, Arab states would be willing to recognise West Jerusalem as the de facto capital of Israel. Thus, the API would bring a regional dimension into the legitimacy of such a difficult political division and allow for talks between the Palestinians, Israelis and the international community on how to manage the sovereignty of the Holy Basin which they all share a claim to. This is an unprecedented departure from the traditional narrative of a united Holy Jerusalem by both parties. Any attempt to paint Jerusalem with religious hues, whether they be Jewish, Christian or Muslim inevitably leads to trouble and a political settlement must be sought. Any other option would ultimately reverberate in radical corners of the world unleashing justifications for an alleged religious war with devastating consequences for all.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The Contours

In exchange, the Arabs offered the following to Israel for its acceptance of the aforementioned requirements:

- a. Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region.
- b. Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.³⁷

Here, the offer is significant in that it proposes a collective security deal and an end to the conflict, a position long sought by the Israelis to temper fears that there would be a revival of hostilities after a Palestinian state should be established. Moreover, there would be no further demands of Israel. Also, the offer to not only recognise Israel but establish 'normal' relations with the state, once a peace is established, is particularly striking in that Arab states would acknowledge Israel as a legitimate neighbour. This is not the de facto position but one that revolutionises the perception of Israel by the Arabs as an outsider to the region. The normalisation debate has often been heavily disputed, as 'normal relations' cannot be attained if the core issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not settled. As a multi-lateral structure for peace, the strength of the initiative lies in three main selling points: first, its symbolism and willingness to recognise Israel as a legitimate part of the Middle East; second, its declaration of its readiness to 'end the conflict',³⁸ a main stumbling block for the Israelis; and third, its strategic vision in positioning a long-term place for peace and security in the Middle East, thereby transforming the regional scene.

Symbolism

The API, most drastically, renders null the renowned 'Three No's' that encapsulated the Khartoum Summit of September 1967, which basically stated 'no peace, no recognition and no negotiations with Israel.'³⁹ This change of attitude towards Israel should not be taken lightly. It indicates a sweeping shift in the Arab policy of rejectionism to one that is accepting of Israel. Hence, the introduction of the API is a powerful and significant change in the collective Arab approach towards the conflict.

37 Text: Arab Peace Plan of 2002. BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1844214.stm.

38 Marwan Muasher, 'The Initiative still stands', *Ha'aretz*, 15 August 2008.

39 Yoram Meital, 'The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Re-examination', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2000):64-82.

End of Conflict

Second, and particularly significant, is that the API would declare an 'end of the conflict'⁴⁰ and in turn a change in the regional dynamic. This would mean that there would be an end to armed hostilities and a transformation of the relationship between the parties to one that is politically cordial. The use of these terms clearly addresses an issue that has been repeatedly sought by the Israelis and one that has arguably met it.⁴¹ Furthermore, it reassures the Israelis that after a solution is agreed upon regarding withdrawal and final status issues, no further demands will be made.⁴² Moreover, the Initiative states that an encompassing and just peace is the strategic choice of the Arab world due to its recognition that a military resolution will bring neither peace nor security to either of the parties.⁴³ This point underscores that there is a unified position amongst Arab states that a resort to a military solution as an option is null. As Alon Ben-Meir contends, the end of all acts of aggression has always been sought as a prerequisite to talks over the course of the history of Arab-Israeli exchanges.⁴⁴ This clause in the API cements it. Additionally, it is important to note that the recognition of Israel will expand to other states making it, in the words of King Abdullah II of Jordan, a '57-state solution',⁴⁵ in reference to the members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. The OIC has repeatedly underscored its support of the Arab peace plan and their willingness to recognise Israel following the adoption of a two-state solution.⁴⁶ In short, Israel's security will not only be affirmed by neighbouring states but also by all Arab⁴⁷ and Islamic nations.

Strategic

The proponents of the Arab peace plan perceive it as a key document for the advancement of peace and one that offers Israel a secure place in the Middle East, consequently diluting the stalemate and allowing for a resolution.⁴⁸ As many have acknowledged, it provides momentum by reactivating the role of peace in the stalled process. First, it offers both the Israelis and the Palestinians a 'regional safety net'.⁴⁹

40 Marwan Muasher, 'The Initiative still stands', *Ha'aretz*, 15 August 2008.

41 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):5.

42 Marwan Muasher, 'The Initiative still stands', *Ha'aretz*, 15 August 2008.

43 Text: Arab Peace Plan of 2002. BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1844214.stm.

44 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):8.

45 Richard Beeston and Michael Binyon, 'King Abdullah of Jordan's ultimatum: peace now or it's war next year', *The Times*, 11 May 2009.

46 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):18.

47 Marwan Muasher, 'The Initiative still stands', *Ha'aretz*, 15 August 2008.

48 Kobi Michael, 'The Arab Peace Initiative – A Historic Opportunity? Background, Meanings, and Possible Avenues of Exploration', *The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies* (2007):iii, <http://www.jiis.org/?cmd=publication.9&act=read&id=60>

49 Dr. Marwan Muasher, e-mail exchange with author, 9 April 2010.

The Initiative grants Israel peace, security and a legitimate political space in the Arab world in return for hard concessions, a proposition decidedly more appealing than a pitiable peace with only one half of the Palestinians.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Israel has much less to fear from a conventional military attack today than it did in 1967.⁵¹ This conventional threat has diminished due to two peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt and the (thus far) continued support for the Arab peace plan.⁵² The real threat emanates from non-conventional non-state actors and extreme radicals on both sides whose influence will be significantly muted should a two-state solution materialise.⁵³ As for the Palestinians, it grants them an Arab shield should they be deemed traitors for the hard concessions they will also need to make.⁵⁴ Leaving the Palestinians to battle the intricacies and boundaries of a peace deal alone could render them very vulnerable indeed if they do not have the backing of an Arab umbrella.

Second, the API affirms the commitment to engage in normal relations with Israel once a political settlement is implemented. This has also been a strategic objective of the Israelis as it fits in with their vision for economic and cultural cooperation across the region. In turn, this translates into a more stable and prosperous political climate, strengthening the scope of shared Middle Eastern collaboration in multiple sectors. Ben-Meir notes that the Arabs cannot dismiss Israel's obsession with its national security, but in the same vein he states (quoting Henry Kissinger) that the Israelis must also acknowledge that acquiring 'absolute security renders the other side absolutely insecure'.⁵⁵ Security is a basic requirement for the Palestinians as much as it is for the Israelis. Also, in the current political climate there is no alternative to the proposed plan. At a meeting arranged by the London-based Oxford Business Group, attendees commenting on the merits of the Initiative noted that there is no peace plan outline that could assure the preservation of Israel 'on 78% of mandate Palestine within a context of regional recognition and cooperation'.⁵⁶

50 Ibid.

51 Stephen M. Walt, 'The Challenge of Mutual Security', in *Israel and Palestine: Two States for Two Peoples-If Not Now, When?*, ed. Herbert C. Kelman and Lenore G. Martin, et al., (New York: FPA Boston Study Group on Middle East Peace, 2010):45.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 46.

54 Dr. Marwan Muasher, e-mail exchange with author, 9 April 2010.

55 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):13.

56 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):4.

The Drawbacks

Despite the many positive elements of the Arab diplomatic drive that grants the API's credibility as a viable vision, there are a number of hindrances to its effective evolution and acceptance. The timing of the announcement was cited as a major obstacle to its ability to garner political steam. At the time of its debut, there was a gust of mistrust in a world still recuperating from the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, on the eve of the first day of the Beirut Arab League meeting on 27 March, a suicide bombing in Netanya (better known as the Passover attack) left 30 people dead. A day later, the Israeli government, headed by then Prime Minister Sharon unleashed what was to be the biggest military manoeuvre directed at the West Bank since 1967, 'Operation Defensive Shield'.⁵⁷ The Bush administration, still trying to recover from the terror attacks of 2001, was focused elsewhere and detached itself from the Middle East peace process. Unsurprisingly, the API's voice was dimmed in the midst of this mayhem and its chances of being heard were, subsequently, cut short.

Additionally, critics have called it an inflexible and uncompromising proposition. This dismissal of the API as a 'take-it-or-leave it' proposal, however, is a thin interpretation of its contents. The parameters of the deal have been more or less drawn for many years. The API adds to them as a basis from which negotiations could start, and like previous negotiations, does not rule out leeway for mutually-agreed upon modifications or equal land swaps.⁵⁸

There is a perception of the proposal as vague⁵⁹ due to several factors: a) the Israeli governments' lack of formal response to it; b) poor efforts on the part of Arab states to advocate for it; and c) the initial tepid response from the US government upon its revelation, underestimating its potential to transform the political setting of the Middle East.

Israeli response

The absence of a formal Israeli government response to the Arab peace proposal has mitigated its message. According to some Israelis, the API does not bring forward anything new nor does it provide any room for flexibility. Furthermore, it was promulgated in the context of an erratic political environment and was rejected by the Israeli Premier Sharon upon its revelation. In 2007, then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was cautious in his comments on the plan commending 'elements' of it. On the other hand Shimon Peres, a leading Israeli political figure and current president, said that

57 Ibid., p. 11.

58 PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, Negotiations and the Peace Process, http://www.nad-plo.org/inner.php?view=nego_peace_saudi-int_Fact%20Sheets_faq1

59 Kobi Michael, 'The Arab Peace Initiative – A Historic Opportunity? Background, Meanings, and Possible Avenues of Exploration', *The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies*, (2007):iii, <http://www.jiis.org/?cmd=publication.9&act=read&id=60>

he saw its spirit was promising.⁶⁰ This unenthusiastic response could be attributed to the dismal circumstances in which the initiative was instigated initially; however, the proposal failed to generate a response even after its reaffirmation in 2007. Currently, the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to disregard the plan due to its unrelenting position on three key areas: its refusal to acknowledge the principle of the right of return, its rejection of a division of Jerusalem, and its resolute opposition to a full retraction to the 1967 lines.⁶¹ All these issues are addressed pragmatically in the API but have fallen flat due to the failure of Israel to formally acknowledge its merits, which consequently has undermined peace advocates.

Despite its continued placement on the political table at the Sirte Arab League Summit in Libya in March 2010, no formal acknowledgement was made by the Israeli government. Although some Arab nations had reservations about its sustainability and wanted to retract it given the lack of reciprocity and the dwindling situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories it was not taken off the table.

Poor Lobbying Efforts

Another major problem with the initiative is that it has failed to sell itself to a sceptical Israeli public despite a direct appeal to them by Saudi King Abdullah in his speech upon its launch. This is due to some Israelis' indifference to an Arab recognition of Israel as there is a widespread perception that there will be no practical gains, and a dismissive attitude toward the political gesture. This has been partly due to a poor promotion effort on the part of Arab states. The Arab League did send a delegation, including Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers, again in 2007 but the magnitude of the message failed to resonate. The chief diplomats seemed to have a successful meeting with their counterpart, then Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni but no formal Israeli response materialised. Furthermore, King Abdullah II took the approach of translating the API into Hebrew and distributing it to Knesset (Israeli Parliament) members. A full-page advertisement was also promoted by the Palestinian National Authority in Israeli papers and by the Israeli pro-peace group Peace Now which was also met with indifference. The API is a hand reaching out; without some reciprocity, as the old Arab adage goes, one hand cannot clap alone.

60 Turki Al-Feisal, foreword to "The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations," Oxford Research Group, (2008):3, http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers/arab_peace_initiative_why_now.

61 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):10.

Long-term Implications of its Demise

The failure to integrate the Arab Peace Initiative into the recipe for peace will certainly leave a bitter aftertaste and can ultimately spoil the meal. A retreat from the centrist approach of the API will only lead to a disengagement from the idea of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The demise or rejection of the initiative would have consequences for a region so much in need of resuscitation from the long-term effects of war. The two main repercussions, should a failure of the two-state solution come about, are the increased hardening of positions and the likelihood of radicalisation, and the collapse of the efforts of the Arab states who subscribe to the political centre (namely Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt).

The first implication of the rejection of the Arab Peace Initiative is that it will lead to a strengthening of the clout of the radicals in both the Israeli and Arab camps. There are worrying signs that both Israeli and Palestinian public attitudes are becoming hardened, particularly when it comes to political compromise. According to a poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research the percentage of Palestinians supporting the API fell from 77 per cent in January 2009 to 58 per cent in March of the same year.⁶²⁶³ More worryingly, the readiness to accept two-states living side-by-side is at 50 per cent.⁶⁴ Amongst the Israeli public, 64 per cent back a two-state option but their willingness to accept it within the margins of a final-status deal also falls significantly to 53 per cent.⁶⁵ If this trend continues, the Middle East will find no middle ground on which peace can potentially reign. In the absence of a clear formal acknowledgement by Israel and more so by the United States, the API's voice will falter and eventually fade.⁶⁶ This would go hand-in-hand with the death of a vision for a two-state solution, and with no alternative, that would have devastating security repercussions not only for the Palestinians and Israelis but also in the wider Arab world.⁶⁷

Coupled with the absence of any allusion to the API at the Annapolis conference,⁶⁸ any alternatives will only assist in encouraging extremism and hardening positions. It will ultimately create a space that opponents of a peaceful accord can exploit and fan fundamentalism amongst vulnerable Arab youth and

62 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 'Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 31', <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2009/p31e.html>

63 It is important to note here that the opinion poll cited was taken in the aftermath of the Gaza War of 2008-2009, therefore, the timing of the poll and general political atmosphere surrounding it should also be taken into consideration as a factor when interpreting these opinions.

64 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 'Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 31', <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2009/p31e.html>

65 Akiva Eldar, 'Haaretz poll: 64 percent of Israelis back two-state solution', *Ha'aretz*, 17 June 2009.

66 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations', Oxford Research Group (2008):5.

67 Ibid.

68 Elie Podeh, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: A Missed Opportunity?' *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, vol.14, no.4. (2007).

ideological Jewish settlers.⁶⁹ The API cannot, on its own, tackle radicalisation generally or totally extinguish it. It can, however, eliminate one feeder of radicalisation – the absence of the materialisation of a Palestinian state – and temper those who instrumentalise the cause for political gain, whether they be ideological fundamentalists or states who use non-state actors as proxies to further their political interests in the region.

The second repercussion of the death of the initiative is the loss of credibility of the moderate Arab centre. The Arab centres' main currency is that of the API, which was packaged by the peace camp and constituted a 'leap of faith' in tackling the interests of both the Arabs and the Israelis.⁷⁰ It has taken a pragmatic approach to a resolution of the conflict and its initiatives have incorporated both the API and the Road Map to attempt to dismantle the deadlock on the peace front.⁷¹ Additionally, at the API's inception, all Arab states, even the most obstinate opponents, together formally endorsed the proposed peace plan.⁷² However, this major undertaking was at first disregarded by the United States resulting in the depreciation of its political capital. A poll in April 2010 suggests that over two-thirds of Israelis and Palestinians favour a two-state solution and that both sides believe that a negotiated agreement that allows both parties to coexist as 'good neighbours' is vital.⁷³ Furthermore, 86 per cent of Palestinians and 66 per cent of Israelis, despite what was deemed as a 'recognition gap' between the two parties – i.e., with respect to their acknowledgment of the particular qualms and main concerns of the other – believe it necessary that the other side's 'just aspirations' be recognised by the negotiators.⁷⁴ It is imperative that the API achieves some progress or else it will be dismissed as futile or, worse yet, be outdone by radicalism.⁷⁵

69 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):5.

70 Marwan Muasher, 'The Initiative still stands', *Ha'aretz*, 15 August 2008.

71 Marwan Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 259.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

73 Geneva Initiative website. New Poll finds: Two-State Solution is the Preferred Option for Majority of Israelis and Palestinians," <http://www.geneva-accord.org/mainmenu/new-poll-finds-two-state-solution-is-the-preferred-option-for-majority-of-israelis-and-palestinians>.

74 New Poll finds: Two-State Solution is the Preferred Option for Majority of Israelis and Palestinians', <http://www.geneva-accord.org/mainmenu/new-poll-finds-two-state-solution-is-the-preferred-option-for-majority-of-israelis-and-palestinians>

75 Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 267.

Recommendations

The current absence of political will to act and make these particularly difficult concessions for peace remains the most difficult challenge to conquer – not the issues themselves. The only solution to close this chapter of collision in the Arab-Israeli conflict is the implementation of a plan for two states coexisting side by side. This can only be achieved by an amalgamation of previous agreements, with the API as a key ingredient and a basis on which negotiations can resume. While it is important that Israel maintain its national security it cannot use this as an excuse to usurp additional Arab territory nor sustain the volatile status quo.⁷⁶ In the same vein, the Arabs must also acknowledge Israel's security concerns and not discount them.⁷⁷ Should the status quo remain as is, the security situation will only be headed for disaster. Moreover, given the duration of the hostilities, both the Israelis and the Palestinians will equally continue to be crippled with fears that any concessions undertaken on issues such as Jerusalem and the 'right of return' may be subject to additional compromises in the future.⁷⁸ A resumed dialogue, within a comprehensive multilateral framework of stakeholders, will relieve pressure on a negotiated, palatable solution that manifests itself in two co-existing states and security for all.

Presently, there is a concern that whilst majorities of the Palestinian and Israeli publics have expressed support for the two-state option, that is now changing. The other option would be a one-state solution, which is not realistic as it will diminish the Jewish majority in Israel and extend an infinite occupation with Palestinian self-determination and a state denied.

There are four primary actions that must be taken in order for a bridging of trust and a meeting of minds to take place. First, there must be political action taken on the ground to defeat the building of distrust and allow for a resumption of negotiations. Second, there must be a reactivation of a marketing plan by the Arab states alongside Israel to trigger and garner more interest in the utility of the API. Third, the United States must be actively engaged in promoting the value of the API as a basis for negotiation, citing security for all as the end-game. Fourth there must be a more proactive endorsement by the Quartet, spearheaded by the European Union, in promoting its value-added appeal to a lasting solution.

76 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):14.

77 *Ibid.*

78 Stephen M. Walt, 'The Challenge of Mutual Security', in *Israel and Palestine: Two States for Two Peoples-If Not Now, When?*, ed. Herbert C. Kelman and Lenore G. Martin, et al., (New York: FPA Boston Study Group on Middle East Peace, 2010):45.

Defeating Distrust

The erosion of trust between the stakeholders in the conflict is proving to be the most effective barrier for a resumption of talks and, in turn, an acceptance of the API. Mutual suspicion is being magnified by the political paralysis of the government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority and with a hardening of public opinion in Israel even humouring a symbolic acceptance of the right of return is repudiated.⁷⁹ The Palestinian National Authority have their hands tied as their credibility as conveyors of peace amongst their domestic constituencies is eroding; years of on-off negotiation have not borne, from the Palestinian publics' perspective, any fruit. On the other hand, the Israeli government – led by a right-wing coalition – is being held hostage by a few extreme zealots working at pulling out the threads of the negotiation quilt. They fear that any concessions made on the Israeli side will ultimately lead to an erosion of the current coalition government. Therefore, political measures must be taken to reassure both sides that they are taking peace seriously – in other words, not just talking the talk but walking the hard political walk. The prospect of a 'multi-bilateral'⁸⁰ approach is therefore crucial, as it gives political cover to the Palestinians and a comprehensive settlement to the conflict to the Israelis. The API can create an incubator for peace, allowing for simultaneous bilateral and multilateral talks but with a clear path to an end result within a given time-frame. In order for this to occur, however, it is important to reassure the Arab and Israeli publics and attain international support.

Reassuring the Israelis

Extended outreach to the Israeli public through a domestic advocacy campaign to better acquaint them with the Arab peace offer is one way to push the proposal forward.⁸¹ One of the most potent criticisms of the API stems from its interpretation as a non-negotiable document or dictum. In a recent interview, King Abdullah II of Jordan underscored that this, in fact, was not the case.⁸² However, in order to demonstrate the seriousness of the Arab peace plan there must be more efforts exerted to expand the marketing campaign and better promote its understanding. There is a lack of interest in Israel partly because some have deemed it irrelevant; a marketing plan would help address the significant need to bring sceptics on board.

79 Rex Brynen, 'The Past as Prelude? Negotiating the Palestinian Refugee Issue', Chatham House, (2008):1, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/research/middle_east/papers/view/-/id/631/

80 Kobi Michael, 'The Arab Peace Initiative – A Historic Opportunity? Background, Meanings, and Possible Avenues of Exploration', The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (2007): vii, <http://www.jiis.org/?cmd=publication.9&act=read&id=60>.

81 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):7.

82 'King Abdullah II interview'. *The Chicago Tribune*, 15 April 2010.

Expanded marketing must be further strengthened by the Arab League. A more active role by the Arabs – and not just the Egyptians and Jordanians who both have peace treaties with Israel – is needed to market the plan as one which is in the best interest of Israel, an effort which could be framed by launching a public peace appeal campaign in the Israeli media. As noted, the Jordanians have translated the text into Hebrew and have distributed it amongst Knesset members, and the Tel-Aviv based Jordanian Ambassador has also been promoting it domestically in Israel.⁸³ Moreover, the Palestinian National Authority has placed full-page peace adverts in Israeli newspapers⁸⁴ promoting the initiative – but this has generated few results and even less interest. Given this, it may be up to the Arab League to boost its marketability with a flurry of diplomatic and media marketing that stresses the merits of the offer.

Furthermore, the Arabs offered to recognise West Jerusalem as Israel's capital if 'East Jerusalem' is established as the future Palestinian capital importantly the wording used was not 'Holy Jerusalem'.⁸⁵ This is a significant shift in the political lexicon of the Arab world and should be underscored to the Israelis. The Arabs should work at emphasising that an Israeli recognition of East Jerusalem would be reciprocated by an Arab recognition of West Jerusalem as Israel's capital should a two-state solution come about.

Lastly, another contentious and difficult hurdle is that of a reconciliation of narratives. Many Israeli commentators assert that what would assuage Israeli public fears is the idea of 'partnership' and what would reassure them is a change in the Arab educational curricula to demonstrate Israel's existence as legitimate.⁸⁶ As Gershon Bashkin aptly asserts, however, this is a 'catch 22 situation' as Israeli educational curricula maps similarly do not take into account the Green Line nor teach the historic 1993 Oslo accords.^{87 88} This is a huge problem facing nations when educating children generally on 'a disputed history'.⁸⁹ A reconciliation of the narratives will surely be one of the most difficult tasks post-peace, as in the absence of it, no such understanding can come about. Such reconciliation cannot realistically materialise without the establishment of a political settlement on the ground, and normalcy in relations cannot be achieved until that is realised.

83 Aluf Benn, 'Obama embrace of Arab peace plan could benefit Livni', *Ha'aretz*, 20 November 2008.
84 Yossi Alpher, 'Breathing New Life Into the Arab Peace Initiative – An Israeli Perspective', Council for Peace and Security, 24 November 2008, <http://www.peace-security-council.org/articles.asp?id=766>
85 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):5.
86 Gershon Baskin, 'Will Israelis ever accept the Arab Peace Initiative?' Open Democracy, 4 May 2009, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/email/will-israelis-ever-accept-the-arab-peace-initiative>
87 Ilene R. Prusher, 'Catastrophe? Israel bans "nakba" from Arab textbook', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 July 2009.
88 The Oslo accords of September 1993 were a historic milestone in Israeli-Palestinian political history in which both the Israelis and Palestinians recognised each other for the first time and signed a memorandum to move towards a peaceful resolution of the decades-long conflict.
89 Ilene R. Prusher, 'Catastrophe? Israel bans "nakba" from Arab textbook', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 July 2009.

Reassuring the Arabs

One move that will help assuage supporters of the API is a formal acknowledgement on the part of the Israeli government on the merits of the initiative. So far, the lack of a response has been perceived as an unwillingness by Israel to extend its hand to the Arabs and a disdain for those Arab countries pushing for the initiative. Although Arab public opinion favours the adoption of the API, many have become sceptical of those proponents of the Arab peace camp who embody the API. There is an erosion of trust in their ability to deliver, due to the current stalemate on the peace front, and hence their legitimacy is at stake. Many perceive those states comprising the Arab centrist political view as making too many concessions to the West as opposed to finding a realistic solution to bringing the occupation to an end and consequently allowing the coming about of a two-state solution and the stability that accompanies it.⁹⁰

More must be done to reassure cynical Arab publics that a concerted effort is being made in the spirit of Oslo towards the establishment of a permanent peace. A total freeze on the expansion of settlements including their natural growth would have a huge impact on the psyche of the Arab world. The dismantling of the settlements is perceived as the most important issue to advance the peace process, according to an International Peace Institute poll in 2009 (alongside the freeing of political prisoners).⁹¹ This would illustrate to the Arabs that they have a partner in Israel working for peace rather than just a negotiating Israeli counterpart. The development of settlements obstructs any chance of a Palestinian state emerging amongst them and consequently negotiations are pointless should this trend continue.⁹² There should be an international monitoring mechanism to ensure that the lid on settlement expansion remains firmly in place.

Another move that would reassure the Arabs would be the restoration of Palestinian governance over the city of Jerusalem – possibly by the restoration of Orient House, the Palestinians' head office in Jerusalem and the main political Palestinian body.⁹³ This would reaffirm the commitment to have a Palestinian governing body in Jerusalem and not institutions that are only Israeli.

90 Marwan Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 260.
91 International Peace Institute. Panel Discussions: Forum on IPI Palestinian Poll Showing Support for 2-State Plan, 17 October 2009, <http://www.ipinst.org/events/details/164-Forum%20on%20IPI%20Palestinian%20Poll%20Showing%20Support%20for%202-State%20Plan.html>
92 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):5.
93 Mick Dumper and Wendy Pullan, 'Jerusalem: The Cost of Failure', *Chatham House Briefing Paper* (2010):4, <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/835/>

US backing for the API

There has been a notable shift in the US official line – namely, that a final resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is in the strategic interest of the United States – since Barack Obama took the helm of the US presidency. From General David Petraeus, head of US Central Command, to Martin Indyk, a prominent former US diplomat, it has been established that the status quo – namely, an indefinite freeze on moving forward on peace – is not sustainable.⁹⁴ For the API to gain prominence, it is imperative that the United States undertake a more active role in pushing the proposal forward – not by making it more palatable to the Israelis, but by emphasising how valuable its utility is strategically. The United States must transform its role from patron to partner⁹⁵, so that it can oversee an implementation that is acceptable to both sides and not only to the Israelis. Furthermore, it is vital that Arab states take a more active part in both alerting and accentuating the importance of the Initiative to the US administration.⁹⁶ There are promising signals as George Mitchell, US special envoy to the Middle East, announced that the Obama administration will incorporate the API into its Middle East policy.⁹⁷ Here, it would be helpful if the document were deemed as one which promotes a vision as opposed to a mechanism or unwavering requirements.⁹⁸

If a peace is to come about it must certainly be accompanied by a strong political will to do so. This will require strong leadership. The leverage the United States has in its special relationship with Israel is noteworthy. In a recent survey of Israeli public opinion, it was noted that while only 40 per cent back the removal of all settlements from the West Bank, 42 per cent back the expansion of settlements but not if it would harm U.S.-Israeli relations.⁹⁹ This demonstrates how much influence the United States has to shape events in the Middle East. An encouraging statistic was that a large majority of Israelis (77 per cent) would back a law that would evacuate settlements in the West Bank and compensate settlers.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, as Israel's strongest ally the United States is in the best position to convince Israel of the merits of the API and that what it offers is in everyone's interest.

94 Martin Indyk, 'If Israel manages alone, it can decide alone', *Ha'aretz*, 21 April 2010.

95 Marwan Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 266.

96 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):7.

97 Barak Ravid and Yoav Stern, 'U.S. envoy: Arab peace initiative will be part of Obama policy', *Ha'aretz*, 5 April 2009.

98 Alon Ben-Meir, 'Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, no. 14 (2009):10.

99 Akiva Eldar, 'Haaretz poll: 64 percent of Israelis back two-state solution', *Ha'aretz*, 17 June 2009.

100 Ibid.

More proactive endorsement by the Quartet and the EU

A more proactive political endorsement by the international community – namely, the Quartet – would also strengthen the power of the initiative. The European Union in particular has garnered much legitimacy in the Middle East due to their perception as being more receptive and engaged than the United States while also demonstrating a greater capacity to understand the various tensions in the region on a range of levels.¹⁰¹ They have also been more active in undertaking joint projects with Middle Eastern states, including reform on the political, economic and social levels, bringing more political gravitas to their diplomacy.¹⁰² A diplomatic effort bringing together key European states to push for the API would be crucial, particularly with regard to monitoring a final peace deal and arbitration as well as funding.¹⁰³

101 Marwan Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), 267.

102 Ibid.

103 Gabrielle Rifkind, 'The Arab Peace Initiative: Why Now? One year on from Annapolis-the need for a regional frame for negotiations' Oxford Research Group, (2008):16.

Conclusion

To say that the Middle East suffers from chronic peace process fatigue would indeed be an understatement. Short-term fixes for a problem that is loaded in both political and emotive terms is at the crux of the problem of the Arab-Israeli conflict. What is needed is a mix of a long-term vision, hard concessions and political willingness to change the status quo. The path to pacifying the conflict is one which includes a two-state solution and a mutually agreed-upon final deal. Time is of the essence. Any delay in deliberations will further dilute the promise of the Arab Peace Initiative, which constitutes a historic compromise that is willing to put aside the narrative of Palestine on all mandate Palestine and accept Israel as a legitimate entity. It is only through the emergence of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital that a regional peace can come about and in turn Israel will attain the security it seeks. Security for the Palestinians within the prism of a sovereign nation existing alongside a secure Israel is the only way a regional accord can descend upon the Middle East. The rejection of the API as a basis from which to resolve the tension alongside former peace agreements may lead back to the spiral of conflict if lessons are not learnt. In the words of Albert Camus, 'Peace is the only battle worth waging' – and it is definitely time.

Appendix I

The Arab Peace Plan of 2002

This is the official translation of the Saudi-proposed Arab peace initiative adopted at the annual Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002.

The Council of the League 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, the 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:
 - a. Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of June 4, 1967 as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.
 - b. Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian Refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.
 - c. 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.
 3. Consequently, the Arab Countries affirm the following:
 - a. Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region.
 - b. 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.

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