

ISRAEL AND THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Alon Ben-Meir, Ph.D.

WORLD
POLICY
INSTITUTE
publisher of
WORLD POLICY JOURNAL

Copyright © 2008 by Alon Ben-Meir.

All rights reserved. Material included in this paper may be copied or duplicated with full attribution.

Alon Ben-Meir, Ph.D.

New York, 2008

Tel. 212.866.5998

e-mail: alon@alonben-meir.com

web: www.alonben-meir.com

RECONCILING ISRAEL'S CORE
REQUIREMENTS FOR PEACE
WITH THE
ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Alon Ben-Meir, Ph.D.

The Arab Peace Initiative offers Israel and the Arab states an historic opportunity to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace.

-- Alon Ben-Meir

Abstract

One of the most momentous declarations to come out of the Arab world since Israel's inception in 1948 is the Arab Peace Initiative, launched in March 2002 in Beirut, Lebanon, and re-adopted by the Arab League in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in March 2007. It would be tragic to allow the Initiative to languish as it offers a solid promise for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. Moreover, the Arab Peace Initiative has the potential to tackle the extremism that has engulfed the Middle East to the detriment of both Israel and the Arab states.

Essentially, the Initiative calls on Israel to agree to full withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967; to arrive at a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, and to accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as the capital. The demands made by the Arab Peace Initiative can be fully reconciled with Israel's core requirements for peace, which are: 1) ensuring Israel's national security and territorial integrity, 2) sustaining Israel's Jewish national identity, 3) securing the unity of Jerusalem as Israel's capital while accommodating the Palestinian demands, and 4) establishing normal relations with the entire Arab world. Failure to embrace the Initiative by Israel and the new US administration will send a dangerous message that neither country is fully invested in ending the debilitating 60-year old Arab-Israeli conflict.

Alon Ben-Meir, Ph.D.
New York

CONTENTS

The Changing Regional Dynamic	7
The Arab Peace Initiative in Principle	8
Israel's Reservations	10
Ensuring Israel's National Security	13
Maintaining the Jewish National Identity of Israel	15
Maintaining the unity of Jerusalem	19
Normalizing Relations with the Arab States	21
Intermediate Measures to Revitalize the Initiative	24
The United States Must Reassess Its Position	27
Syria is the Key to a Comprehensive Peace	30
Allaying Israel's Concerns	33
References	35
Appendixes	36

RECONCILING ISRAEL'S CORE REQUIREMENTS FOR PEACE WITH THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

The Changing Regional Dynamic

The geopolitical landscape surrounding the reintroduction of the Arab Peace Initiative¹ in 2007 at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh is entirely different from the atmosphere when it was adopted in 2002 at the League's Beirut meeting. The convergence of ominous developments in the Middle East in the wake of the Iraq war have placed Israel in a better position strategically than it was in 2003 to achieve comprehensive peace and security with its neighbors.

In 2002, there was no war in Iraq, the second Intifadah² was raging, and Iran's ambitions to become the region's hegemon armed with nuclear weapons were far more muted. There was no major Sunni-Shiite conflict looming with the threat of engulfing the entire region, extreme Muslim radicalism was less developed, and the global Jihadi movement was markedly less ambitious. The situation is now reversed. To stem the tide of these ominous trends, peace with Israel has now become urgent especially in the eyes of Sunni Arab moderates. Many are looking for ways to work with Israel such that the Arab public will allow them to coalesce more strongly against Iran and the growth of extremism, which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular feeds into. In addition, because Syria is essential to producing a united Sunni front, ending the conflict with Damascus has assumed a new urgency.

The Arab Peace Initiative provides an historic opportunity to achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace between Israel and all Arab states. This is particularly critical as the Initiative offers, in the words of the former Jordanian Foreign Minister Dr. Marwan Muasher, "Peace not only with Israel's neighbors but all Arab states, none excluded, which has always been a key Israeli demand."³ On the basis of the document and the intent of the Arab states behind it, the Initiative can be reconciled with Israel's four core requirements for making peace: 1) ensuring Israel's national security and territorial integrity, 2) sustaining Israel's Jewish national identity, 3) securing the

unity of Jerusalem as Israel's capital while accommodating the Palestinian demands, and 4) establishing normal relations with the Arab world.

A successful breakthrough will depend on the ability of Arab and Israeli leaders to disabuse their respective communities of the notion that either side can have it all. For example, no negotiation will allow Israel to hold on to settlements or turn a blind eye to settlement activity just as the Palestinians will not realize the right of return. Leaders from both sides need to cultivate a national mindset conducive to a peace agreement that will likely fall short of what the general public has been led to believe is possible. Neither Israel nor the Arab states can claim to seek a real peace if they do not show the flexibility necessary to resolve some of the most intractable issues separating them. The impetus to do so must lie in the mutual recognition that they now have a unique, if not historic, opportunity to capitalize on the changing regional and geopolitical developments and thus can make peace with normal relations, a reality that has eluded them since 1948.

It is in this context that the Arab Peace Initiative has become so critical. The Initiative calls on Israel to agree to full withdrawal from the occupied territories; to arrive at a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem—based on UN General Assembly Resolution 194⁴ and other resolutions including UN Security Council Resolution 242⁵; and to accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as the capital. Israel has so far rejected in principle the right of return and does not subscribe to full withdrawal from the territories. Nevertheless, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert saw positive elements in the Initiative, which in its original form was dismissed by the Sharon government after being adopted by the Arab League in 2002.

The Arab Peace Initiative in principle

It is important to note that the preamble of the Initiative contains elements that were used in past negotiations between Israel and

Egypt and Israel and Jordan, specifically, principles enunciated in UN Security Council Resolution 242⁶. Similar negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in the early 1990s led to the Oslo accords, although the Camp David negotiations in the summer of 2000 failed at the last minute. Israel and Syria also engaged with each other on the same basis in December 1999 and March 2000⁷; however, in the end they too were unable to reach agreement. The more recent indirect talks mediated by Turkey however, may lead to an Israeli-Syrian deal regarding the Golan Heights. The most compelling argument for the Arab Peace Initiative however, is not that it addresses new issues or involves solutions divergent from those agreed upon in previous frameworks. The difference between the Initiative and Oslo, Camp David, or the Clinton Parameters, is that it has taken those issues previously discussed and included all 22 Arab states in the process, so that if signed would ensure regional peace. From this brief summary, it is possible to surmise that, given the environment in which the Arab Peace Initiative has been re-launched, it can certainly form the basis for future negotiations. The Initiative begins with this statement:

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

-Reaffirms the resolution taken in June 1996 at the Cairo extraordinary 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.

-[The Initiative calls] 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.

The document then goes on to establish the critical principle that peace is the strategic option. Ultimately all 22 Arab states are offering full peace and normal relations in exchange for the return of the territories captured in 1967. In light of the fact that this has been Israel's goal, albeit in accordance with national security and demographic requirements, the following clause in the Initiative stating that no military solution exists is of paramount importance:

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.*

Finally, to signify the substantial shift in attitude the Arab states have demonstrated, one has to recall another Arab League resolution adopted in Khartoum in November 1967, known for its famous three NOs⁸:

The Arab Heads of State have agreed to unite their political efforts at the international and diplomatic level to eliminate the effects of the aggression and to ensure the withdrawal of the aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands which have been occupied since the aggression of June 5 [1967]. This will be done within the framework of the main principles by which the Arab States abide, namely, no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country.

Israel's reservations

Top Israeli officials have expressed that the Initiative is not balanced because it makes no demands on the Palestinians⁹. In crafting it, the authors certainly were conscious that for such a framework

to lead to a comprehensive peace, extensive negotiations would be required. Whatever Israel expects the Palestinians or the Syrians to do will have to be part of the rules of engagement that must be established before any negotiation commences in earnest. It should be noted that Israel's principle demand, throughout the history of its contacts with the Palestinians—at least since 1988 to the present—has been an end to the violence as a precondition to serious negotiations. At various times, Israel even negotiated with the Palestinians (as it is currently doing) and the Syrians while violence was raging. Israel should not be expected to negotiate under the gun, but given the volatility on the ground Israel may choose—as the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said—to negotiate as if there is no terror and deal with terror as if there are no negotiations. A careful strategy must be adopted to ensure that the progress in negotiations is greater than the damage or disruptions caused by violence. Israel and the moderate Palestinians led by the Palestinian Authority should take confidence building measures, for example, Israel can freeze the expansion of settlements while the Palestinians can end public incitements against Israel.

The split between Hamas (which governs Gaza) and Fatah (now in control of the West Bank) has already changed the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Although it is difficult to assess the ultimate consequences of the split, for the moment it is possible that Fatah's commitment to a nonviolent resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock has paved the way to more serious negotiations with Israel. The PA has been eager since the 2007 Annapolis Peace conference to engage in negotiations, thus empowering them would be a wise strategy on the part of the Israelis. Therefore, it is critical that the Initiative is looked at, interpreted, assessed, and dealt with in light of its intended objective. Specifically, Israel needs to subscribe to the Initiative's stated central goal, a comprehensive peace and normal relations between Israel and all the Arab states. To be sure, Israel's acceptance of the Initiative will be based on the attainment of this ultimate goal, which, as a precursor to adopting it, the Israeli government must clearly articulate to its own public and to the outside world.

The Israeli government should accept the Initiative not simply because it has an obligation to its people to explore any possibility to peacefully end the Arab-Israeli conflict, but because of the raging regional turmoil; the document offers a narrow window of opportunity which events beyond the control of the Arab states and Israel may quickly close. For example, peace under a Livni Kadima party is much more feasible than if Likud's Netanyahu comes to power. Thus the Arab states should use this time frame to present their Initiative while they have this opportunity with a more tolerant Israeli leadership. Mindful of this possibility, Israel can accept the Initiative in principle, and for as long as it remains consistent with their legitimate requirements for achieving peace. If Israel acts in this way, the international community and the Arab states in particular will be far more receptive to its national concerns.

A few Israeli officials noted that the Initiative reads and sounds like a diktat. Although the document may be interpreted in different ways, it is useful to view it as articulating a vision rather than a plan of action or a set of non-negotiable demands. The preamble of the document evokes not only the non-binding UN General Assembly Resolution 194 but also UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338¹⁰, the latter two which Israel accepted, even using them in previous negotiations with Egypt and Jordan. In brief, Israel needs to focus on the positive aspects of the Initiative rather than what may be negative and it should not be on the defensive. If looked at from this perspective, the following phrases from the Initiative neither sound nor read as a diktat:

Peace is the strategic option of the Arab countries...

Request Israel to consider its policies...

Achieving a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon...

Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended...

Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.

Reading the Initiative in this positive light, one can ask, "What can Israel expect from the Arab states in addition to achieving

its four fundamental requirements?” The present document is a far cry from the Khartoum resolution and different from anything else that has collectively emerged from the Arab states. It represents a transformation of the Arab position. This is why the way in which one interprets the Initiative is so critical. How Israel’s leaders choose to read it will be based on their ultimate intentions. The Initiative is not structured on an all or nothing basis and as long as the Israelis genuinely seek peace, they should focus and even capitalize on the scope of the document. The Initiative touches on each of Israel’s core requirements, and although the language may appear firm, it leaves significant room for negotiation. If Israel’s leadership sees this, how should it go about reconciling the four fundamental requirements with the Initiative?

1 - Ensuring Israel’s national security

Although the Arab Peace Initiative calls for withdrawal from all the post-1967 territories, in previous negotiations between Israel and Jordan and between Israel and the Palestinians, many creative ideas were floated, suggesting that some give-and-take is necessary for reaching any agreement. The Initiative suggests:

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.

Israel relates any and all discussions of territorial withdrawal to its primary concern—national security. For Israel, accepting the Initiative as stated will mean returning 100 percent of the territories captured in 1967. From the Israeli perspective this is practically unfeasible, though the 1967 line represents the borders to which Israel needs to withdraw in principle. The Arab states, in other words, maintain it is not for Israel to decide unilaterally the extent of the withdrawal; rather any adjustment of the 1967 borders will have to be

negotiated and agreed upon by both parties. Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Husseini, Jordan's ambassador to the US noted that previous negotiations between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Jordan were based on the same principle—the 1967 lines constituted the base line. As the negotiations unfold, however, both sides will have to show flexibility. To create secure borders based on UN Security Council Resolution 242, and taking into account some hard facts on the ground (including a number of settlements Israel will insist on incorporating into Israel proper), Israel will have to swap land equitable in size and quality in areas contiguous to the Palestinian territories.

Although many Israelis—and even more supporters of Israel in the United States and elsewhere—still equate these territories with national security, history has proved this linkage to be largely misleading. Decades of occupation have failed to enhance Israel's security and have actually undermined it. The popular claim that the withdrawal from southern Lebanon and Gaza turned these territories into new staging grounds for violence against Israel tends not to account for the unsystematic process in which the withdrawal unfolded. Israel expected positive reinforcement and encouragement from the Gaza withdrawal, which never occurred. The withdrawals were neither complete nor executed in a manner that could foster improved relations. In addition, the withdrawal from both territories was involuntary. Southern Lebanon had become a killing field for Israelis and stirred intense public debate (more than 1,000 Israeli soldiers died during Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon between 1982 and 2000), while the pullout from Gaza was prompted by an undesirable demographic scenario. The failure of the Sharon government to negotiate the transfer with President Mahmoud Abbas in advance on many of the details, and the failure of Abbas to seize the opportunity and consolidate his power in the evacuated territory caused disastrous consequences.

What is critical to understand for any framework is that the Arab states simply will not make peace without recovering the territories. In the end, Israelis must choose between peace and territory; they cannot have it both ways. But the Arab states, especially the Palestinian

Authority and Syria, with which Israel still has territorial disputes, must also remain open-minded. The 1967 lines cannot be fully restored; therefore, some give and take must occur to achieve what UN Security Council Resolution 242 calls for on both sides:

... To live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from the threat or acts of force.

If Israel appears to be obsessed with national security matters, the Arab states must not dismiss the Israeli concerns as trivial. While the history of the Jews has been full of exile and tragedy, Israel today is threatened daily by Islamic radicals such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Muslim Brotherhood, and states like Iran, whose existential threats it cannot take lightly. Nonetheless, Israel must also understand, as Henry Kissinger once observed, that the attainment of absolute security by one side renders the other side absolutely insecure. Israel is viewed as a regional superpower with a military capacity that no single Arab state or combination of states can overwhelm in the foreseeable future. So, while it is understood that Israel must safeguard its national security with all its might, it must not use national security as a pretext for acquiring more Arab land or maintaining the precarious status quo. The Israeli Supreme Court has previously ordered the government to reroute sections of the fence/wall being constructed between Israel proper and the West Bank because it caused undue hardship to several Palestinian communities. In the Court's opinion, there were no compelling national security concerns that justified the Israeli actions. The same is applicable to many settlements in the West Bank, which were built under the umbrella of national security, but in fact have absolutely no impact on Israel's real security.

2- Maintaining the Jewish national identity of Israel

The provision in the Arab Peace Initiative that addresses the Palestinian refugee problem is viewed by Israel, both literally and figuratively, as a threat to its very existence as a Jewish state. The clause reads as follows:

II- Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

Sadly, the Arab states and the Palestinian leadership have perpetuated the myth of “return” knowing, at least since the mid-1980s, that Israel simply cannot and will not accept any sizeable number of Palestinian refugees into Israel proper and still be able to retain the Jewish national identity of its state. This explains why Israel will not accept the 1948 UN General Assembly Resolution 194 which contains the “right of return” of the Palestinian refugees to their former property in Israel. Though the resolution stipulates “achieving just settlement of the refugee problem,” it is critical to note that the Security Council Resolution 242 supersedes 194, which, in any case, is a non-binding resolution as are all General Assembly resolutions. The “right of return” has remained a constant in Arab narratives for the past sixty years and thus over time assumed a life of its own. The Arab states’ formal position on the right of return as articulated in the Arab Peace Initiative must be used as a framework for creating a solution to the refugee problem, rather than a call for an unfeasible policy. Nabil Fahmy, Egypt’s former ambassador to the US echoed this sentiment, acknowledging that Israel cannot logistically accept the right of return, and that the solution lies in the resettlement and/or compensation of the Palestinians. He also noted that insisting on repatriation would bring any peace negotiation to a quick halt. What he and many of his Arab colleagues want is for Israel to acknowledge, first, that there is a refugee problem and then to show a willingness to be part of the solution, which the Olmert government began to publicly articulate near the end of its tenure. In any case, accepting a sizeable number of Palestinian refugees—in the tens of thousands—is not part of the solution. The Lebanese government also strongly opposes any resettlement of the nearly 400,000 Palestinian refugees presently residing in their country. As former Lebanese ambassador to the US Farid Abboud¹¹ explained it, “The permanent settlement of the refugees in Lebanon will dramatically shift the demographic makeup of the

Lebanese population, with ominous implications for the stability of the state.” He also argues that a violent confrontation similar to the one that took place in the summer of 2007 between Palestinian militants and the Lebanese army could escalate the conflict and push Lebanon into another devastating civil war.

Although the issue of right of return should ideally be discussed in public to prepare the Arab street for the necessary compromises, because of the extreme sensitivity of the issue for both sides, the best course is to leave negotiations private to work out the details. Open-ended public discourse might create public pressure that could torpedo the negotiations before they even begin. And to avoid a repetition of the breakdown that occurred during the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David, both sides need to understand each other’s position through quiet diplomacy prior to formal negotiations. At the eleventh hour of Camp David, Yasser Arafat sprung the issue of the right of return, effectively ending any chance for an agreement. The lesson from this unhappy episode has not been lost: no one knows better than the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, which feel directly threatened by the ongoing regional developments, that for Israel the right of return is a nonstarter and the passage of time will not change its position.

In a subsequent negotiation at Taba, Egypt, in January 2001, no position papers were exchanged concerning the refugee problem, which was seen as a good sign for open-ended talks. Both sides stated that a comprehensive and just solution to the issue of the Palestinian refugees is central to “a lasting and morally scrupulous peace.” Both sides also agreed to adopt the principles and references that could facilitate the adoption of an agreement. In addition, the two parties suggested that, as a basis, they should agree that a just settlement to the refugee problem be in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 242. The resolution called for “Achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.” This phrase is often interpreted to mean a just solution of the refugees through resettlement and or compensation.

For the Arab states, and even more for the Palestinians, giving

up the right of return is tantamount to tossing away their trump card. They simply will not show their hand before Israel indicates its willingness to accept the Arab Peace Initiative in principle. To achieve a comprehensive peace agreement, both sides will have to make many painful concessions. Accommodating Israel on the right of return is one of them. In fact, the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority concerning the Palestinian refugees are entirely based on the proposition that the solution must be found in resettlement and compensation.

Although some Arab states and organizations continue to insist that Israel accept the principle of right of return, today the majority talk about finding a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, as the Initiative suggests, in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 242. While Israeli leaders must admit to the existence of the refugee problem, they will not accept unlimited numbers of Palestinian refugees, thereby altering the demographic makeup of the state through the implementation of Resolution 194. Regardless of how sensitive this issue may be for the Palestinians, the existence of Israel as the last refuge for the Jewish people, in the view of an overwhelming majority of Israelis, rests entirely on securing a sustainable Jewish majority within the state. It is critically important to understand that this is not a question of right or wrong. Sari Nusseibah, president of Al-Quds University, observed this fact when he said that Israel simply will not return all the territories captured in 1967 and then accept that the Palestinian refugees return to their original homes, in what is today Israel. In January of 2008, Jordan's Foreign Minister Dr. Salaheddin Al-Bashir raised the issue regarding the viability of Israel's requirement for a sustainable Jewish majority. He argued that given the birth rate of Palestinians versus Israelis which is roughly 3 to 1, even without the influx of Palestinian refugees the Palestinian citizens of Israel would become a majority within three or four generations. Israelis have made it clear they will take whatever measure necessary to insure the sustainability of the Jewish identity of the state. Regardless of what happens 100 years from today, the sooner the Arab states and especially, the Palestinians accept this prin-

ciple Israeli requirement, the more flexible Israel will be on many other conflicting issues, including the future of Jerusalem.

The Palestinians do have a right in their homeland but this right must be addressed justly in part through resettlement in the future Palestinian state (to be established in the West Bank and Gaza) and by other humanitarian efforts. It should be noted that former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recognition that the continued occupation of Palestinian territories is not sustainable is precisely because of the demographic threat (which subsequently gave birth to the Kadima party and the withdrawal from Gaza). In 2005 Ehud Olmert, who was then serving as Deputy Prime Minister under Ariel Sharon, responded to the question of why it took this long for Likud (before the Kadima party was formed) to recognize the demographic threat, noting that: "Well, it is better to recognize it now than never."¹²

3- Maintaining the unity of Jerusalem

Regarding the future of Jerusalem, the Arab Peace Initiative states:

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.

It is now accepted as inevitable by the vast majority of Israelis that sooner rather than later a Palestinian state will be established in Gaza and in most of the West Bank. No consensus has formed, however, about whether East Jerusalem will be its capital. During the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David in the summer of 2000, President Clinton and Prime Minister Ehud Barak conceded that the Arab part of East Jerusalem should be the capital of the Palestinian state. Though the Israeli government does not subscribe fully to the Clinton Parameters, a solution to the future of Jerusalem may not be as insurmountable as it may seem. The Jewish affinity for Jerusalem

extends over millennia and represents the embodiment of Jewish existence and freedom. The Jews' holiest shrine, the Temple Mount (the remnant of the Second Temple), commonly referred to as the Western Wall is in Jerusalem and no Israeli government would survive should it contemplate physically dividing the city again.

For the Arabs, Jerusalem is equally sacred; two of the holiest Arab shrines, the al Aksa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, along with many Muslim educational institutions, are in East Jerusalem. At the Taba negotiations both sides accepted the principle of control over their own respective holy sites. According to this principle, Israel's sovereignty over the Western Wall would be recognized although there remains a dispute over the delineation of the area covered by the Western wall and especially the link to what is referred to, in President Clinton's idea, as the space sacred to Judaism of which it is part. There were several other issues over which the two sides continue to disagree but there was a shred of sentiment that an amicable solution would eventually be found.

Since more than 250,000 Palestinians live in East Jerusalem, and no artificial separation or wall can be erected that can effectively isolate the interdispersed Arab and Jewish communities from each other, both sides favored the idea of an open city. The Israelis suggested the establishment of an open city whose geographical scope encompasses the Old City of Jerusalem plus the area defined as the Holy Basin. Conversely, while the Palestinian side was also in favor of an open city they insisted that continuity and contiguity were preserved. The Palestinians emphasized that the open city is only acceptable if its geographical scope encompasses the full municipal borders of both East and West Jerusalem. While both sides have held fast to their positions, many feel that the reality on the ground will ultimately fashion a mutually accepted formula. Indeed, many Israelis and Palestinians envision Jerusalem as becoming a microcosm of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence; thus, once other difficult issues are resolved, a solution to the future of Jerusalem may not be as elusive as some skeptics argue. Although no agreement has been reached regarding the political line that would separate East from West Jerusalem, it

is important to note that during these negotiations at Taba, the Israeli side accepted that the City of Jerusalem be the capital of the two states: Yerushalaim, capital of Israel and Al-Quds, capital of the state of Palestine.

4- Normalizing relations with the Arab states

The Arab Peace Initiative is clear on normalizing relations with the Arab states and ending the violence, knowing that for Israel peace must go beyond a mere quelling of violence.

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.

The fourth core requirement is of paramount importance to Israel because its future stability and progress depend on it. Only a comprehensive peace, a complete end to hostilities and unambiguous recognition can offer Israel the ultimate security it requires. Whereas the Initiative promises that, Israel will seek to translate the peace between governments into a people-to-people peace, in which ordinary Arabs and Israelis develop a vested interest in the process and so are motivated to preserve and protect it.

Specifically, Israel will seek *Zulh* (in Arabic, “peace of reconciliation”) rather than just *Salam* (generally translated as “cessation of hostilities”). Israel’s concerns over the exact nature of the peace it is looking for are based on its perception of the political realities within the individual Arab states and the prevailing volatile and violent environment of the Middle East. Israel’s insistence on people-to-people peace emanates from its experiences with Egypt and Jordan. Although their governments greatly value the peace accord with Israel, the peace has generally left ordinary Egyptians and Jordanians cold because the

peace agreements have not changed their lives perceptibly for the better.¹³ The lack of a vested interest in the peace by the general public in these two countries is particularly worrisome for most Israelis because of the existence of strong constituencies of Islamic radicals in Egypt and Jordan that oppose peace with Israel as well as its right to exist. Given the political volatility within several Arab states and the absence, from the Israeli perspective, of any legitimate succession process, the Israelis argue that Israel stands to take a considerable risk in making peace with current Arab leaders should an Islamic radical group assume power in the future. The rise of Hamas in the Palestinian territories and its takeover of Gaza offer a vivid example of what can transpire; thus, a possible ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere may not be ruled out. Because of these pressing concerns, Israel will insist on absolutely normalized relations that should translate to open trade, cultural exchanges, tourism, investments, development projects, and all the other trimmings that come with allies living in peace.

These confidence-building measures will take time to create, but the process of real change will have to begin once the negotiations get under way in earnest. To promote such a positive situation, the Arab states need to demonstrate that they have the capacity and the political will to rein in extremist groups, like Hamas and Hezbollah, should they refuse to heed the Arab collective will. Thus far, several Arab states have not only refused to impede the activities of such groups; they have actually supported their violent resistance to Israel. While current Palestinian factionalism and violent internal rivalries are to a large degree preventing Israel from accelerating the peace negotiations with the Palestinians, its leadership must find the resolve to develop a coherent strategy to deal with the Palestinian conflict. To be sure, Israel should not wait for the Palestinians to settle their internal conflicts. It is in Israel's long-term interest to encourage Palestinian moderates by taking some unilateral actions on the ground to ease the lives of ordinary Palestinians. Measures that Israel can enact without major risk to its national security concerns may include the release of more prisoners, as well as allowing for the freer movement of people

and goods. In addition, Israel should reward non-violent communities in the West Bank with economic incentives and channel tens of millions of Palestinian tax dollars to moderate Palestinians. Time has come for Israel to swallow the bitter pill and put an end to settlement expansion, remove new outposts and even dismantle two or three existing settlements that it will have to dismantle in any case to send a clear signal of its intension to end the occupation. It must stop settlement activity at the minimum during negotiations, and must commit its government to more transparency as to not give off the impression of saying one thing while doing another. Continuing settlement expansion as a rebuttal for the Palestinians call for the right of return is a defeating cycle and must be broken for negotiations to succeed. Israel should allow Palestinian cultural and educational institutions to reopen in east Jerusalem as well. Most importantly, Israel must abandon its tit-for-tat policy and deal with the Palestinians more in terms of a long-term strategy leading to a negotiated settlement, rather than on a tactical, ad-hoc basis.

A stronger demonstration must also come from the Israeli government to make institution building and economic viability a possibility for the Palestinians in the West Bank. This means reducing the checkpoints so that cargo can be transported more fluidly as well as allowing Palestinians better access to water supplies. Many farmers cannot live on their own land and the process of getting supplies and harvests in and out of checkpoints makes economic sustainability extremely difficult. While Israelis understandably must always keep security in mind, they have to realize that a Palestinian population with institutions, jobs, and an economy will in the long run help to dissolve the vast lifestyle disparity between the two peoples. Building new settlements in the midst of an impoverished Palestinian people and land will only continue to rouse angst.

The Palestinians must too demonstrate that they are committed to a political solution and abandon in word and deed all forms of violence to achieve their political objective. In addition, the Palestinians must bring to an end any form of incitement against Israel and promote publicly the importance of peaceful and neighborly relations.

More importantly, the Palestinians must begin to rewrite text books (especially history and geography), to reflect the existence of the state of Israel and imbue school children with a bright prospect for the future instead of martyrdom. These measures are as important for the Palestinians as for Israel because they foster greater confidence among the Israeli public allowing its government to make meaningful concessions. It will also go a long way towards undermining Hamas and greatly strengthening the Palestinian moderate camp to present a real alternative.

Intermediate measures to revitalize the Initiative

The Arab Peace Initiative can address Israel's core requirements and reconcile them with its basic premises. Both sides need to understand, though, that the near total erosion of trust and the continued existence of Muslim radicals and Israeli right-wing elements—each adamantly resisting any solution that requires major concessions to the other—will make any negotiation extraordinarily difficult. In this context, it ought to be clarified that although no symmetry exists between Muslim radicals and right-wing Israeli elements, there are Israeli groups as committed to greater Israel as there are Muslim radical groups committed to eliminating Israel. From the Israeli perspective, Israeli right-wing extremists may appear different than Islamic radicals because they rarely resort to armed violence. But domestic extremist groups will probably not stop short of using every means in their power to torpedo efforts to exchange territory for peace, even if that peace is genuine. The assassination of late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin should not be dismissed as an aberration. Whether the conviction of these groups emanates from their belief that the Arab states will never make real peace with Israel or from a belief that the land of Israel has been bequeathed to the Jews by providence, and thus no one is allowed to relinquish any inch of it, is beside the point. The point is that a pullout from the West Bank will undoubtedly have far greater emotional and psychological impact on the Israeli public than the withdrawal from Gaza has precipitated. One can count on Israeli

extremist right-wing elements to capitalize on the public's anxieties and encourage resistance, potentially in violent forms.

While no Arab state or any other major power should expect Israel to compromise appreciably on these four requirements, Israel too must come to grips with the reality that occupation is not sustainable and must be ended if it truly wants a comprehensive and lasting peace. As Morocco's Ambassador to the US Aziz Mekouar stated, government official stated: "Israel must choose between continuing occupation and a state of constant belligerency or making peace and raising its flag in 22 Arab Capitals...I do not have to tell you the implications of what that could mean to Israel's future developments and the entire region...it is nothing less than a revolutionary transformation." Similarly, Jordan's US Ambassador Al-Husseini stated, "Israel will be able to establish diplomatic relations with 55 Arab and Muslim states, now imagine the implications of this prospect." But for this to happen, both sides must show a far greater sense of urgency to act. Algeria's Ambassador Amine Kherbi noted that: "This time the Arab states are very serious, Israel must not miss this opportunity by default, simply doing nothing about it, we are all eager to end this debilitating conflict." The deteriorating conditions in the region will continue to evolve and are bound to unravel into something even more chaotic and catastrophic if action is not taken. This environment will allow the extremist forces of Islamic radicalism to further grow in numbers and sophistication with the capability to create conditions beyond control. As the National Intelligence Estimate released in July 2007 strongly suggests, these Islamic radical forces, especially Al-Qaeda, are gaining tremendous ground daily. This raises a serious concern that if the conditions on the ground do not change for the better within a few years, neither the Arab states nor Israel will be able to rein them in.

Although the Initiative is a momentous document, the Arab states simply cannot wait for Israel to act. They must make clear and open overtures toward Israel to demonstrate to their own masses that their leaders have made a strategic choice for peace while simultaneously assuring the Israeli public of their commitment to peace. This is

what the Israeli public wants to see. They remember very well the late President Anwar Al-Sadat's offer of peace with Egypt in exchange for the territories captured in 1967. Sadat traveled to Jerusalem before receiving any assurance that Israel would concede even a single inch of territory. He journeyed there because he wanted by his action to demonstrate his commitment to peace. This, more than anything else, persuaded the Israeli public to fully support the Camp David negotiations in 1979, which led to peace between the two nations and Israel's total withdrawal from Egyptian territories.

Imagine the effect on Israelis if Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah traveled to Jerusalem to worship at the Muslim's third holiest shrines and while there address the Israeli Knesset on the merits of the Initiative. Imagine the shift in Israeli public opinion if the public sees Arab officials other than Jordanians or Egyptians (as designated by the Arab League to pursue the Initiative with Israel) meeting with their Israeli counterparts inside or outside of Israel. Imagine the effect of these encounters on Arab extremists who seek the destruction of Israel, as they face the collective Arab will. Such overtures do not suggest acceptance of the Israeli position or the endorsement of its policies. That is, they do not signify that the Arab world recognizes Israel's borders or Jerusalem as its capital or the settlements as legitimate. What they mean is that the Arab world accepts Israel as a state, and is thus willing to translate a declaration of principles into a peace process. When President Sadat addressed the Israeli Parliament he made absolutely clear the price Israel had to pay for peace. He was cheered and hailed by the vast majority of Israelis as the most courageous, visionary, and trustworthy leader. Now, nearly 30 years later, Egypt remains at peace with Israel. The Arab League courageously put forth the Arab Peace Initiative, a document that would have been unthinkable without Sadat's historic journey.

How do the Saudis expect their Initiative to provide the basis for Arab-Israeli peacemaking if they continue to refuse even a handshake with an Israeli official? Although a host of issues separate Israel from the Arab states, Israel's distrust remains the underlining factor as long as there are radical Arab groups and Islamic states such as Iran

that openly avow and actively seek its destruction. Israel may be accused of paranoia regarding its national security, but then how do the Arab states intend to address this paranoia when Israelis measure their national security in existential terms? Efforts to persuade Israel to embrace the Initiative must include concrete and transparent steps that clearly demonstrate a real change in the conflict's dynamic, as the Israeli public sees it. "Public," is the key word here. The Arab states seeking peace must be unequivocal in their readiness to interact with Israel. They must appeal directly to the Israeli public, which despite its factional nature, agrees on the terms for real peace. If the Arab states do not want this Initiative to meet the fate of the earlier version in Lebanon, in 2002, then they must change strategy.

The United States must reassess its position

It is at this strategic time, when major shifts are occurring in Iran, Iraq, and throughout the region, that the US should strongly endorse the Arab Peace Initiative, especially since the Arab states have collectively sponsored it and it could significantly improve Arab-American relations. Washington must keep in mind that because the Initiative is an Arab not an American or European document it has practical advantages. For obvious reasons the Arab masses will relate much more positively to any peace proposal arising out of the Arab political world than they would to the Road Map or the Geneva Initiative or the Clinton Parameters, which were received with a degree of suspicion. This is particularly important because the Arab streets today are openly antagonistic towards the United States and Israel and will relate far more positively to a process generated from their own fold.

While the Arab Peace Initiative has garnered a certain amount of traction from political and peacekeeping organizations, it must also be discussed in the context of the existing framework: The Road Map. While officially introduced in 2003 by the Bush camp, the Road Map was not discussed as a priority until 2007 as a last-minute effort to make progress where few, if any, American presidents have succeeded

in the past. Whether it will transfer over to the next American president is questionable, but at this point it would be futile to rest the weight of the peacemaking process in the hands of a country who does not share the risks and burdens associated with negotiations. Should the US have a seat at the table when it comes to Arab-Israeli affairs? Absolutely. The sticks and carrots and long-term investment the US has to offer cannot be matched by any other power, and thus it will always be involved in brokering any deal. But at this point, it is long overdue that an Arab-Israeli peace treaty is borne of and implemented by the governments and people directly affected by the process.

The essential difference between the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative is the fact that the latter comes from the very states that will bear the responsibility of its implementation or failure. Incorporating Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar and the rest of the Arab League states directly into the process is a feat that no US mediation has yet accomplished. The ultimate problem with the Road Map in this sense, is that the US has the ability to shift it to the backburner should another conflict arise, as is often the case. But the neighboring countries of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon cannot afford to shelve negotiations with Israel or the Palestinians, as any violence, refugees, land transfers, uprisings, or extremist movements will have a direct affect on their people and governments.

The second major flaw of the Road Map was in the details. What the Bush administration failed to understand was the absolute significance of even the smallest parcel of land. Every settlement erected, every strategic vantage point used for violence is a threat to existence for the Israelis and the Palestinians. With two lines on freezing the settlements and no real discussion of what the final Palestinian state might look like, the Road Map took for granted the attachment both sides have to every square foot of strategic land. The specific language reads that, "The government of Israel dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001. Consistent with the Mitchell Report, the government of Israel freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)." Clearly this step has not been implemented as more than 1600 units have been built in the West

Bank since the 2007 Annapolis conference.¹⁴ In the same token, violence has been subdued only temporarily by the ceasefire with Hamas and extremism is continuously rising.

To call for a cessation of any violence and settlements activity without serious and continuous negotiations showed some of the idealism on behalf of the US government and its hopes for the Road Map. Any specific requirements by either side were tied up in a process of succession, where both sides inability to get past the first steps prohibited any other progresses that could have been made. It took the US five years to admit this downfall, and in January of 2008 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice finally suggested:

The reason that we haven't really been able to move forward on the peace process for a number of years is that we were stuck in the sequentiality of the Road Map. So you had to do the first phase of the Road Map before you moved on to the third phase of the Road map, which were the actual negotiations of final status.

The Arab Peace Initiative, while also not ingrained in the details of implementation, has given far more breathing room for negotiations with a final status in sight: the creation of a viable Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem and the security of normal relations for a safer Israel. The issues of refugees, settlements, and violence are all dealt with in an authoritative manner, but with an understanding that each step must be worked out between both parties.

Ultimately the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative are not exclusive peace plans incapable of coexisting. If Israel were to work out an agreement within the framework of the Initiative, it would not have to discard the peace efforts of its closest ally. But more importantly, it could secure a relationship with the moderate Arab governments that could prove useful when paired with the international involvement of the US, EU, Russia and UN.

This does not diminish the importance of active US involve-

ment in any Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. Historically, no major Arab-Israeli accord, disengagement of forces or peace treaty has resulted without direct American involvement in one way or the other. The Bush administration's lukewarm endorsement of the Initiative discouraged both sides from making the necessary bold moves toward serious negotiations or reaching an agreement that requires them to make major concessions. The benign negligence the Bush administration demonstrated in dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has only worsened the situation. Given this failed policy, it may be useful for Washington to recall that the Initiative is not limited to Israel and the Palestinians. Other Arab countries, like Syria, which has a territorial dispute with Israel, are involved. It is logically impossible, as well as pragmatically unhelpful, for any administration to support an Arab-Israeli peace dialogue while simultaneously seeking a regime change in Damascus. The new administration should initiate a change in policy toward Damascus and encourage Israel to negotiate with the Al-Assad regime.

Syria is the key to a comprehensive peace

Syria should be a key player in any comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since Syria subscribed to the Initiative and has called time and again for peace talks, Israel has finally made the right decision to engage Syria, albeit indirectly through Turkey. The realization that without Syria there can be no hope for a comprehensive peace has convinced Israel that time has come to open up to Damascus with the tacit approval of the Bush administration. Israel and Syria fully understand the requirements for a peace agreement which is the return of the entire Golan Heights in exchange for comprehensive peace with normal relations. Without establishing these requirements in advance it is doubtful that the two nations would have entered into any negotiations directly or indirectly.

As an integral part of the Arab Peace Initiative, the importance of engaging Syria cannot be overestimated. Without peace between Israel and Syria, Israel will always remain insecure on its northern

front. Peace with Syria will also pave the way to an Israeli-Lebanese normalcy specifically because Syria is imbedded in Lebanon's social, economic, and political makeup and it continues to exert tremendous influence over Hezbollah. Moreover, Syria can wield significant influence on the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations because more than any other Arab state it provides not only a sanctuary for Palestinian radicals but also holds weight in the Palestinian national movement. Syrian influence transcends the Arab-Israeli conflict because as a predominantly Sunni state, Syria can shift the dynamics of the Shiite-Sunni conflict away from a dangerous escalation beyond the Iraqi borders. In any effort to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions, Syria has strategic value as luring it out of the Iranian orbit would isolate Tehran and weaken its resolve. Syria can play a moderating role in Iraq as well, and can be extremely helpful in any campaign to stabilize the fractured war-ridden nation. Finally, Syria matters in the war on terrorism because it has the capacity to help in gathering intelligence and in reining in many of the radical Islamic elements.

The Israeli strike on what appeared to be a partially built nuclear reactor in 2007 only reinforces the need to seek an end to the Israeli-Syrian conflict. The attack could have created a major international incident, but it did not. For its part, Damascus was unwilling to admit to the extent of the attack or to identify the presumed target, and in so doing, obscured the target's location and how much was destroyed, thereby avoiding public pressure to retaliate. The Israeli government too kept unusually mute about the incident, both to prevent exposing the Syrian government to public embarrassment and to avoid further provocation, which could have led to a violent escalation. It should also be noted that it was the Olmert government who encouraged the Bush administration to invite Syria to the Annapolis conference knowing full well that the Syrian delegation would raise the issue of occupation of the Golan Heights.

In acting prudently, both sides were driven by the lack of viable options but mostly by their strategic interest to enter into peace negotiations. Damascus and Jerusalem know that while talk and even preparation for war may be necessary to pacify certain elements in

each camp, the only real option is a negotiated peace agreement. Each realizes that another Israeli-Syrian war will not alter in any fundamental way the current situation. Each state also knows it can inflict heavy human losses and material damage on the other but that Syria cannot retake the Golan Heights by force, while Israel, following the second Lebanon war, cannot sustain indefinitely its occupation of the Golan with impunity. After more than forty years of occupation, the Israelis finally understand that they have been unable to improve security on their northern borders and that Syria has not shifted its focus for a second from regaining the Golan. This episode only underscores the fact that one cannot discount Syria's impact directly and indirectly on all the region's major issues and, therefore, its constructive engagement has the potential to realign the forces behind much of what troubles the region.¹⁵

Damascus is fully aware that it must pay a price in any peace negotiations with Israel if it is to lead to Syria regaining the Golan Heights. Such a price, must however, be integral to—not a precondition of—the negotiations. Damascus has no incentive to be helpful, let alone rein in extremism, when the threat of regime change by the United States continues to hover over the government. In fact, the greater the threat to the regime is, the tighter its leaders hold on to power.

What should Israel expect Syria to do in connection with its allies: Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas? Damascus must demonstrate as a part of the Arab Peace Initiative that its call for peace negotiations is not some tactical play to buy time, but is part of a genuine peace-seeking strategy. Thus, Syria will have to be ready to undertake clear and transparent measures, including severing its relations with radical Islamic groups, ending its political and logistical support of Hezbollah, stemming the flow of insurgents and military hardware to Iraq, reducing its strategic reliance on Iran, and ending its support to Hamas to demonstrate its commitment to peace. A change in US policy toward Damascus will bring about much of this desired outcome because the Syrian leaders will act in their best interest and understand the limitations of their current policies. Damascus is looking for a rapproche-

ment with the US which could pave the way to regaining the Golan. For the United States and Israel, the prospective gains are enormous, so they must not continue past policies that have led nowhere, except to erode regional security conditions.

Regardless of the nature and the makeup of the regime in Damascus, be it democratic or despotic, Syria's national obsession with regaining the Golan and its historic and special interest in Lebanon will not go away. As long as Damascus continues to have claims on both, it can be expected to do whatever it can to secure its own interests. Since no functioning, stable democracy is expected to emerge in Syria in the near future, the United States and Israel will be far better off dealing with a regime that has the authority to commit itself to a policy or a set of actions and take the necessary steps to back up its commitment. Historically, Syria has demonstrated that once it commits itself to any agreement it fulfills its obligations. Sticking to the rules of the 1974 disengagement agreement with Israel is one of many examples. Thus, the Arab Peace Initiative has the potential to work out Syria and Israel's negotiation process with a larger and more inclusive framework in mind.

Allaying Israel's concerns

Israel must realize that accepting the Arab Peace Initiative is not a sign of weakness. Israel has never been stronger militarily or economically than it is today. This is precisely why it can accept the Initiative by openly stating its four core principles, which no Israeli government can give away and no serious Arab interlocutor can deny. And it is why, rather than rejecting certain aspects of the Initiative, the Israeli government should make its core requirements abundantly clear and use the document's positive elements to find a way to negotiate over the other aspects. By stating its four core requirements, Israel is giving nothing away. In fact, the Arab states will have to concede in many areas to meet those requirements, and if they fail to reach an agreement, Israel can stand its ground.

Any commitment to negotiate a peace agreement based on the

general principles of the Arab Peace Initiative is arguably a high-risk game. From the Israeli perspective, the occupied territories are vitally linked to national security, and the Jewish identity of the state is directly related to the kind of solution brought to the Palestinian refugee problem. For these reasons no one should expect Israel to lay down its arms even after a comprehensive peace agreement has been achieved. Indeed, the geopolitical and security conditions in the Middle East will remain precarious for many years, especially because of Iran's ambitions to become a regional hegemon armed with nuclear weapons. This prospect concerns not only Israel, which would require it to maintain its military superiority for the foreseeable future, but also the Sunni Arab states which are extremely concerned over Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear arsenals.¹⁶ Moreover, any Israeli government, regardless of its political orientation, must also be able to envision the end-game with some certainty before it can initiate such a commitment, which is why Israel needs to establish at the outset its core requirements, and also why the Arab states must be prepared to deal with them in good faith. All Arab states, not only Egypt and Jordan, must demonstrate that their Initiative is genuine and that they are ready to engage the Israelis.

Israel, as indicated, must take advantage of the ways that the Iraq war has substantially altered the political and security conditions in the Middle East, posing a serious challenge to the region's old geopolitical order. Because Iran's regional ambitions alarm both the Sunni Arab states and Israel, this creates the possibility of an alliance of necessity. The reintroduction of the Arab Peace Initiative at this particular time is not accidental. It is designed principally to change the region's new political atmosphere in a central way, by ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. The confluence of events offers Israel and the Arab states an opportunity that they cannot afford to miss.

Alon Ben-Meir is Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University and the Middle East Project Director at the World Policy Institute, New York.

Alon@alonben-meir.com www.alonben-meir.com

References

- ¹ See appendix 1: “Arab Peace Initiative”, March, 2002 (http://www.jordanembassyus.org/arab_initiative.htm#ai)
- ² The second Intifadah started on September 2000 in the wake of a visit by former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount and the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations at Camp David.
- ³ Marwan Muasher, former Jordanian Foreign Minister said this at a meeting I had with him in DC on August 6th, 2008
- ⁴ See appendix 2: “UN General Assembly Resolution 194”, December 11, 1948.
- ⁵ See appendix 3: “UN Security Council Resolution 242”, November 22, 1967.
- ⁶ These negotiations led to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979 and Israel and Jordan in 1995.
- ⁷ These negotiations were held under the auspices of the Clinton administration.
- ⁸ “The Khartoum Resolutions”, September 1, 1967 (<http://www.ipcri.org/files/khartoum.html>)
- ⁹ Top officials in the Israeli National Security Council in consultation with the Prime Minister expressed this sentiment to me in 2007.
- ¹⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 338 was adopted on October 22, 1973. See appendix 4.
- ¹¹ Ambassador Farid Abboud, former Lebanese Ambassador to the United States, with whom I spoke in May 2007 in Washington DC.
- ¹² In a conversation I had with Ehud Olmert during his visit to New York in the fall of 2005 when he served as Deputy Prime Minister under Ariel Sharon.
- ¹³ In a conversation with Egypt’s Foreign Minister Abu-Ghait in Cairo, June 2006, he insisted that open-ended relations between Israel and Egypt will be possible only after a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- ¹⁴ This figure comes from a presentation by Daniel Seidemann at the United Nations Conference on the Question of Palestine in Malta, June 2008.
- ¹⁵ Syria’s call for entering unconditional negotiations with Israel was reiterated to me by a top Syrian official three weeks after an Israeli air strike on September 6, 2007.
- ¹⁶ In a conversation I had in September 2006 with General Omar Suleiman, Egypt’s Interior Security Minister and Chief of Intelligence, when he noted that Iran’s nuclear ambitions represent the greatest threat to Egypt.

Appendix 1

The Arab Peace Initiative

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

- Reaffirms the resolution taken in June 1996 at the Cairo extraordinary 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 Abdullaziz, 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 U.N. 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.

Appendix 2

Creation of a Conciliation Commission- General Assembly Resolution
194

11 Dec 1948

VOLUMES 1-2: 1947-1974

I. FROM MANDATE TO INDEPENDENCE

13. Creation of a Conciliation Commission, General Assembly
Resolution 194 (III), 11 December 1948:

The third session of the General Assembly refused to accept any decision altering the Partition Resolution of the preceding year, nor did it decide on ways of its implementation. Instead, it decided to set up a United Nations Conciliation Commission, reiterated the decision on internationalization of Jerusalem, and laid down several principles on the refugee question. Text of Resolution 194 (III) follows:

The General Assembly,

Having considered further the situation in Palestine,

1. Expresses its deep appreciation of the progress achieved through the good offices of the late United Nations Mediator in promoting a peaceful adjustment of the future situation of Palestine, for which cause he sacrificed his life; and

Extends its thanks to the Acting Mediator and his staff for their continued efforts and devotion to duty in Palestine;

2. Establishes a Conciliation Commission consisting of three States Members of the United Nations which shall have the following functions:

- (a) To assume, in so far as it considers necessary in existing circumstances, the functions given to the United Nations Mediator on Palestine by the resolution of the General Assembly of 14 May 1948;
- (b) To carry out the specific functions and directives given to it by the present resolution and such additional functions and directives as may be given to it by the General Assembly or by the Security Council;
- (c) To undertake, upon the request of the Security Council, any of the functions now assigned to the United Nations Mediator on Palestine or to the United Nations Truce Commission by resolutions of the Security Council; upon such request to the Conciliation Commission by the Security Council with respect to all the remaining functions of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine under Security Council resolutions, the office of the Mediator shall be terminated;

3. Decides that a Committee of the Assembly, consisting of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, shall present, before the end of the first part of the present session of the General Assembly, for the approval of the Assembly, a proposal concerning the names of the three States which will constitute the Conciliation Commission;

4. Requests the Commission to begin its functions at once, with a view to the establishment of contact between the parties themselves and the Commission at the earliest possible date;

5. Calls upon the Governments and authorities concerned to extend the scope of the negotiations provided for in the Security Council's resolution of 16 November 1948 and to seek agreement by negotiations conducted either with the Conciliation Commission or directly with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them;

6. Instructs the Conciliation Commission to take steps to assist the Government and authorities concerned to achieve a final settlement of all questions outstanding between them;

7. Resolves that the Holy Places - including Nazareth - religious buildings and sites in Palestine should be protected and free access to them assured, in accordance with existing rights and historical practice that arrangements to this end should be under effective United Nations supervision; that the United Nations Conciliation Commission, in presenting to the fourth regular session of the General Assembly its detailed proposal for a permanent international regime for the territory of Jerusalem, should include recommendations concerning the Holy Places in that territory; that with regard to the Holy Places in the rest of Palestine the Commission should call upon the political authorities of the areas concerned to give appropriate formal guarantees as to the protection of the Holy Places and access to them; and that these undertakings should be presented to the General Assembly for approval;

8. Resolves that, in view of its association with three world religions, the Jerusalem area, including the present municipality of Jerusalem plus the surrounding villages and towns, the most Eastern of which shall be Abu Dis; the most Southern, Bethlehem; the most Western, Ein Karim (including also the built-up area of Motsa); and the most Northern, Shu'fat, should be accorded special and separate treatment from the rest of Palestine and should be placed under effective United Nations control;

Requests the Security Council to take further steps to ensure the demilitarization of Jerusalem at the earliest possible date;

Instructs the Conciliation Commission to present to the fourth regular session of the General Assembly detailed proposals for a permanent international regime for the Jerusalem area which will provide for the maximum local autonomy for distinctive groups consistent with the special international status of the Jerusalem area;

The Conciliation Commission is authorized to appoint a United Nations representative who shall cooperate with the local authorities with respect to the interim administration of the Jerusalem area;

9. Resolves that, pending agreement on more detailed arrangements among the Governments and authorities concerned, the freest possible access to Jerusalem by road, rail or air should be accorded to all inhabitants of Palestine;

Instructs the Conciliation Commission to report immediately to the Security Council, for appropriate action by that organ, any attempt by any party to impede such access;

10. Instructs the Conciliation Commission to seek arrangements among the Governments and authorities concerned which will facilitate the economic development of the area, including arrangements for access to ports and airfields and the use of transportation and communication facilities;

11. Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible; Instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations;

12. Authorizes the Conciliation Commission to appoint such subsidiary bodies and to employ such technical experts, acting under its authority, as it may find necessary for the effective discharge of its functions and responsibilities under the present resolution;

The Conciliation Commission will have its official headquarters at Jerusalem. The authorities responsible for maintaining order in Jerusalem will be responsible for taking all measures necessary to ensure the security of the Commission. The Secretary-General will provide a limited number of guards for the protection of the staff and premises of the Commission;

13. Instructs the Conciliation Commission to render progress reports periodically to the Secretary-General for transmission to the Security Council and to the Members of the United Nations;

14. Calls upon all Governments and authorities concerned to cooperate with the Conciliation Commission and to take all possible steps to assist in the implementation of the present resolution;

15. Requests the Secretary-General to provide the necessary staff and facilities and to make appropriate arrangements to provide the necessary funds required in carrying out the terms of the present resolution.

Appendix 3

United Nations Security Council Resolution 242

November 22, 1967

Following the June '67, Six-Day War, the situation in the Middle East was discussed by the UN General Assembly, which referred the issue to the Security Council. After lengthy discussion, a final draft for a Security Council resolution was presented by the British Ambassador, Lord Caradon, on November 22, 1967. It was adopted on the same day.

This resolution, numbered 242, established provisions and principles which, it was hoped, would lead to a solution of the conflict. Resolution 242 was to become the cornerstone of Middle East

diplomatic efforts in the coming decades.

The Security Council,
Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the
Middle East,

Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war
and the need to work for a just and lasting peace, in which every State
in the area can live in security,

Emphasizing further that all Member States in their acceptance of the
Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act
in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

1. Affirms that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the
establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which
should include the application of both the following principles:
 - o Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occu-
pied in the recent conflict;
 - o Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and
respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, terri-
torial 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;
2. Affirms further the necessity
 - o For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through interna-
tional waterways in the area;
 - o For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;
 - o For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political
independence of every State in the area, through measures
including the establishment of demilitarized zones;
3. Requests the Secretary General to designate a Special Representative
to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts
with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist
efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance

- with the provisions and principles in this resolution;
4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

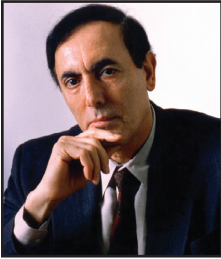
Appendix 4

United Nations Security Council Resolution 338
October 22, 1973

In the later stages of the Yom Kippur War -- after Israel repulsed the Syrian attack on the Golan Heights and established a bridge-head on the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal -- international efforts to stop the fighting were intensified. US Secretary of State Kissinger flew to Moscow on October 20, and, together with the Soviet Government, the US proposed a cease-fire resolution in the UN Security Council. The Council met on 21 October at the urgent request of both the US and the USSR, and by 14 votes to none, adopted the following resolution:

The Security Council,

1. Calls upon all parties to present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;
2. Calls upon all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;
3. Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.



Dr. Alon Ben-Meir

Dr. Alon Ben-Meir is an expert on Middle East politics and affairs, specializing in peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. For the past twenty five years, Dr. Ben-Meir has been directly involved in various negotiations and has operated as a liaison between top Arab and Israeli officials. Dr. Ben-Meir serves as senior fellow at New York University's School of Global Affairs where he has been teaching courses on the Middle East and negotiations for 17 years. He is also a Senior Fellow and the Middle Eastern Studies Project Director at the World Policy Institute. Dr. Ben-Meir hosts "Global Leaders: Conversations with Alon Ben-Meir," a series of debates and conversations with top policy-makers around the world. He also regularly holds briefings at the US State Department for international visitors.

Dr. Ben-Meir writes frequently and has appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines and websites including the Middle East Times, the Christian Science Monitor, Le Monde, American Chronicle, the Week, the Political Quarterly, Israel Policy Forum, Gulf Times, the Peninsula, The Jerusalem Post, and the Huffington Post. He also makes regular television and radio appearances, and has been featured on networks such as CNN, FOX, PBS, ABC, al Jazeera (English and Arabic), and NPR.

He has authored six books related to Middle East policy and is currently working on a book about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dr. Ben-Meir holds a masters degree in philosophy and a doctorate in international relations from Oxford University. He is fluent in English, Arabic, and Hebrew.

WORLD
POLICY
INSTITUTE
publisher of
WORLD POLICY JOURNAL

Alon Ben-Meir, Ph.D.

alon@alonenben-meir.com

www.alonben-meir.com