



The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict Current And Future Scenarios

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While, especially since the Oslo Accords, there are many avenues by which an examination of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict might be approached, any such process will persistently necessitate an acknowledgement of various factors, such as the question of land, the contradictory national historical perceptions, the concept of a full settlement, the actual dynamics of negotiations, and the so-called 'culture of coexistence' between Palestinians and Israelis on the ground.

This paper intends to examine those factors, in an attempt to help understand why the peace process has collapsed and Oslo failed and what are the likely scenarios for the future.

The Question of Land

The legitimate ownership of the land of Palestine, the sovereign power to possess it, and the political-military ability to control and govern it has been the core of the conflict between the Palestinian people and the Zionist movement since the end of the 19th Century and until today. Early Zionism spread the myth that the land chosen for the establishment of the Jewish state was "a land without a people for a people without a land," a myth many Israelis still cling to. Early Palestinian rejection of and resistance to the incursions of another people upon their land was recorded in the many uprisings and sacrifices on the ground, while their many political attempts to halt Jewish immigration and acquisition of land repeatedly failed. Regardless of the different interpretations and perceptions of the unfolding historical events of the conflict, it can be stated that the first internationally-imposed effort to contain the conflict was the UN Partition Plan of 29 November 1947. The plan foresaw the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state on 56.47% and an Arab state on 43.53% of the country; this despite the fact that Jews - one-third of the population at the time - owned merely 7% of the country. The Arab League and the Palestinians rejected the plan outright, which led to the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49 (*Naqba*), in the course of which two-thirds of the Palestinian people fled their homes in the face of Jewish forces and atrocities.

In addition to the land allotted to them in the Partition Plan, the Jews conquered another 23% during the war, leaving them controlling 78% of the country, while the remainder – the Gaza Strip and the West Bank- fell under Egyptian and Jordanian administration respectively.

In the course of the June 1967 War, Israel conquered this remaining 22% of Palestine, which it has occupied ever since in blatant violation of international law, while Palestinians found themselves dispersed in four broad communities – Arabs in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the rest of the world – mainly in neighboring Arab states.

There is no fast or easy settlement to the conflict since the struggle is over a land which two parties claim; the rightful owners lacking the force to implement their legitimate claims and a forceful military power, able to force its claims beyond the rights of the indigenous population. Palestinians are convinced that Israelis have always had in mind the pursuit of their two main strategic and ideological goals – settlements and expansion wherever possible – goals reflected in the fact that Israel has, to this day, chosen not to define the country's international borders.

The Concept for a Settlement

To solve such a deep-rooted, complicated and long-standing conflict as the Israeli-Palestinian one requires first and foremost not only mutual understanding but also a readiness to see and treat the other side as an equal. However, Israel has yet to learn this lesson and cease their disrespect for Palestinian rights and aspirations. An overriding theme in the Israeli conception of a settlement has been the aim of forcing Arabs to recognize the Jewish state on the land of Palestine – if necessary by means of war - and to ‘finalize’ matters by having the Palestinians acknowledge the legitimacy of that state.

The Arab concept for a settlement following the war of 1948, on the other hand, was to challenge the Jewish state by force, even warfare, stressing its illegitimacy; a drive which failed due to the balance of power and conflicting interests among the ruling regimes. A second approach dominated after the occupation in 1967, stressing the applicability and need for international law and demanding the implementation of UN resolutions. With the acceptance of the two-state solution – first raised in the PLO’s ten-point program of 1974 – this concept switched to one arguing that if the Jews found a legal and ‘moral’ reasoning to establish a homeland on a land which was not theirs, the insistence of the Palestinian people upon establishing their own state on their rightful homeland must also be understood. This formulation came to the fore after the October 1973 war convinced the Palestinian leadership around Arafat that Palestinian objectives would not be achieved by military means but required a more pragmatic approach, i.e., through negotiation.

Years later, in 1987, Palestinians initiated a new chapter under the banner of the (first) Intifada, calling for a change in the *status quo* (ending Israeli occupation) and for reaching freedom and independence on national soil, rather than waiting for a solution to come from outside. From today’s perspective it can be noted that one of the main achievements of the Intifada was an accelerated change in the mindsets of the two parties, leading to new levels of communication and relations, based on the notion of mutual recognition and the commencement of direct contacts and talks to finally settle the decades-old conflict and come to an end of the occupation.

These contacts, along with events in the international (fall of communism) and regional arenas (Jordanian disengagement from the West Bank and the Gulf War), and the mere fact that Israel had failed in its effort to achieve a military solution to the Intifada, led to the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference in October 1991.

The Palestinian leadership accepted terms allowing them to delegate an ‘insider’ delegation to participate under a joint umbrella with Jordan to Madrid, but it soon became clear that there was no change in Israeli policies and that their sole intention was to push the Palestinians into accepting the old (1979) limited autonomy plan. While the ‘official’ peace process continued in Washington, Moscow and elsewhere with no progress, several secret back-channel tracks were opened directly between the Palestinians and Israelis, one of which was the Oslo process that led to the signing of the Declaration of Principles, Oslo Accords in Washington on 13 September 1993.

The Dynamics of Negotiations

The Oslo Accords - often considered a historical breakthrough - were based on the formula of land-for-peace and the implementation of UNSC Res. 242 of 1967. They officially manifested the mutual recognition between the state of Israel and the PLO as representing the Palestinians. At the heart of these accords was a phased process comprising a transitional period, in which a complete Israeli withdrawal and the establishment of Palestinian autonomous rule was to be achieved, and a second phase to tackle ‘difficult’ issues at a later stage, eventually leading to a ‘final status’ agreement. Originally, the entire process was scheduled to end on 4 May 1999, but at that date even most of the agreed-upon interim issues remained unimplemented.

On paper, or from the distance of foreign media reporting, relations between the two sides appeared to be moving in a promising direction, but facts on the ground betrayed the real extent of the divide which continued to separate the two – maybe more so than ever. It was too rarely remembered that both leaderships reached the point of historical recognition not out of any firm conviction or acceptance of the other's political agenda, but rather out of urgent internal interests. Israelis had realized their failure in both containing the Palestinians as a cheap labor market and in creating an alternative leadership to the PLO and now hoped to reach an end to the costly Intifada and thwart a feared Islamization of resistance in the OPT. The PLO in Tunis, meanwhile, had become weak, isolated and was not only facing political and financial bankruptcy following the Gulf War, but also regarded the rise of a popular local national leadership within the Palestinian territories, the loyalty of which was doubted, as a threat to its position. A further PLO concern was the continuous talks of King Hussein of Jordan with the Israelis, which, it was feared, might marginalize the PLO's status and restore Jordan's influence in the OPT.

It was against this background that both sides agreed to go to Madrid, and the process initiated was thus doomed to failure as both sides not only pursued utterly conflicting goals but also held totally contradictory perceptions on each and every aspect of their involuntarily common history.

The Deception

From the outset Israel and the PLO shared little common ground in their conceptions concerning the central formulae or principles upon which negotiations were conducted: land-for-peace and the implementation of UNSC Resolution 242. On the Israeli side mutual recognition was limited to an organization in its role as representative of a people but not of the people themselves nor of their right to statehood. What Israel sought was Palestinian recognition and acceptance of the Jewish state *and* Palestinian acceptance of 'sharing,' through a form of limited autonomy, the 22% that was left of historical Palestine (the occupied territories). In short, Israel's prime objective was to maintain the occupation of as much of the West Bank and Gaza as possible while using the Palestinian self-government as an agent to help in this endeavor and legitimize its result.

The Palestinians' expectations were completely different; as a step towards ending occupation and establishing their state with East Jerusalem as its capital, they not only accepted such an unequal 'mutual' recognition but also the concept of staged negotiations, which delayed discussion of issues of their greatest concern. Moreover, they allowed the division of the West Bank into Palestinian-controlled Area A (the 6 major Palestinian towns), Area B with joint patrols, Palestinian civil authority and Israeli complete security control (a patchwork of Palestinian villages), and Area C (Jewish settlements and the remainder of the Palestinian territories), where Israel remains in absolute control.

Beyond overall discrepancies of intent and conception, issues on the ground following Madrid immediately evinced clear Israeli deception, as they ignored their pledges with an abject lack of conviction; failing in their commitments to redeploy from the Palestinian territories, to freeze their settlement programs, and to stop land expropriations, house demolitions, and other practices; a situation which proved that the historical conflict continued unabated and had only entered a new chapter, deceptively entitled "The Peace Process".

Along this line Israel has, over the last decade and in spite of that period's five consecutive Israeli governments each with its respective personnel, interests and party agendas, maintained a consistent strategy based on maintaining full control of the OPT, with the overriding aim of closing any possibility for a viable future Palestinian state. Israeli policies have succeeded in – and continue their drive toward - establishing 'facts' on the ground. Today, after years of "peace talks" the number of Israeli settlers in the Palestinian territories has doubled, now comprising some 380,000 – 180,000 of them in East Jerusalem alone.

On the Palestinian side, the transformation of the PLO from “a resistance movement in-exile” to a “state-building institution” in the territories is painfully far from realization. Today, disillusion is widespread as the limited and often purely cosmetic, administrative authority of the PA has become as clearly apparent as the fact that Israel retains effective and ultimate control over the entire area, and that there is no end to the occupation in sight.

A Culture of Coexistence ?

It can be said that, with few exceptions in the Israeli peace camp, the discourse in Israel was never – neither prior nor following the inception of the peace process - about reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and equal rights but rather about the dynamics and nuances of Zionist hegemony and control. This is one factor that explains the circle of violence that has dominated the headlines in the last years, beginning with the massacre perpetrated by a settler upon 29 Muslim worshippers at Al-Ibrahimi Mosque (February 1994) but progressing steadily with the murder of PM Rabin by an Israeli fanatic (November 1995); the assassination of Hamas activist ‘The Engineer’ Yahya Ayyash (January 1996), followed by a series of revenge suicide bomb attacks and the Qana’ massacre perpetrated by the Israeli army, killing over 100 civilians in a bombing raid in South Lebanon ...

The coming to power of right-wing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (Likud) in June 1996 was the first Israeli response to this “test of peace”. Immediately, the Likud government disregarded the Oslo agreement, rejected the land-for-peace formulas and voted unanimously to cancel restrictions on settlement developments – both their expansion and establishment. Netanyahu challenged the Palestinians when he ordered the opening of a tunnel under the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in September 1996, which led to the worst clashes since the Intifada and left over 60 Palestinians dead and over 1,500 injured.

The ‘crisis-management’ summit that followed - convened in Washington in the first week of October with Arafat, Netanyahu, Clinton and King Hussein - was the first of an ensuing series, all of which had one thing in common, the desperate attempt to get the peace process going despite all the obvious signs of its decay. Since it was not the roots but the symptoms that were addressed, none of these sessions bore serious results.

Tensions and violence erupted once more with the struggle over the withdrawal from Hebron, the announcement of plans to construct the new Har Homa settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem, and the violent suppression of 1998’s Nakba Day memorial marches, marking the 50th anniversary of the Palestinian ‘catastrophe’.

It was in this climate of mistrust and fear that Ariel Sharon was appointed to the Foreign Ministry by Netanyahu and the Wye River Plantation negotiations were subsequently conducted – to re-negotiate previously agreed accords Israel refused to implement under the pretext of security. Although some understanding was reached and ‘canonized’ in the “Wye River Memorandum”, the newly stipulated withdrawals were postponed as the previous ones had been, and nothing changed.

In May 1999, the political scenery changed once more when the early Israeli elections brought Labor back to power, with former Chief of Staff Ehud Barak as Prime Minister. One of his first acts was to lay out his “red lines” on a negotiated solution to the conflict, comprising of an absolute refusal to see Jerusalem divided or as the capital of any Palestinian state, a rejection of the 1967 ‘Green Line’ as a basis for withdrawal, a pledge that no foreign (i.e., Palestinian) army west of the Jordan River would be permitted and a commitment not to dismantle Israeli settlement ‘blocs’ in the West Bank. To impose his own agenda Barak rushed to revise the Wye Memorandum with a new agreement signed on 4 September 1999 at Sharm Esh-Sheikh, effectively annulling the Wye redeployment schedule and percentages. In actual terms Barak managed to limit transfers to a mere 7% of Palestinian land from Area ‘C’ to Area ‘B’, before joining Palestinian negotiators at Erez on 13 September 1999 to declare the commencement of final status negotiations. By this day, marking the 6th anniversary of the signing of the DoP, there was already a growing certainty among many

Palestinians that Oslo was not able to produce the minimum required to meet Palestinian needs, expectations and aspirations.

Nevertheless, negotiations continued, some official, others secret, and the claims of progress in talks never ceased. Policies on the ground however hardly changed and by the beginning of 2000, the Israelis had again reduced their redeployment quotas (transferring 2% of Area 'B' to Area 'A' and 3% from 'C' to 'B') and introduced final status maps, "offering" 55-60% of the West Bank, which was rejected outright by the PA. In March, an embattled PA, succumbed to Israeli pressure and agreed on maps detailing an Israeli phased withdrawal from 6.1% of the West Bank, leaving the PA in control of 18.2% of the West Bank. Two months later, the Israelis postponed indefinitely this long-awaited transfer – which was to include the Abu Dis, Izzariyya and Sawahreh villages near Jerusalem.

Camp David, July 2000

With Israel's continuous reluctance to keep pledges and implement the transitional agreements, the various channels of direct and secret negotiations on the outstanding issues remaining without any sign of understanding, and in a desperate attempt by the Israeli government to stay in office after the resignation of most of its ministers and the split of the Knesset, Barak set out to achieve a final agreement with the Palestinians, ending the conflict, at a summit in Camp David under the auspices of US President Clinton. Palestinians realized that they could not afford to decline the invitation and be labeled as the 'obstructors' of peace by the international community for turning down President Clinton's call for "historical talks" and went to the summit imposed on them.

There has been more than one version and interpretation of the Camp David talks. Some came directly from the negotiation teams and others from those who were somehow related to them. In spite of the fact that no news was leaked from Camp David while the talks were going on – a principle the parties has agreed upon beforehand in order to allow the participants to express themselves as freely as possible – the talks breached all the sensitive outstanding issues without exception, which inevitably became the 'talk of the town' in both Israel and throughout the Arab world.

Barak's team considered its offer as generous and of historic significance, comprising the establishment of a Palestinian demilitarized state on 90-95% of the OPT and the return of a limited number of 'selected' refugees. In exchange, the Palestinians were to declare an end to the conflict and to relinquish their basic national aspiration of the right of return. As for the question of land, the Palestinian position was that they had made already a huge and painful concession when they recognized the state of Israel on 78% of their homeland and thus limited their national demands to only the remaining 22% of the land, i.e., the West Bank and Gaza Strip in their pre-1967 borders. To compromise even further on these lands was unacceptable and implied that the Israelis were not content with what they conquered in 1947-49 but wanted to share what they occupied in 1967.

On the questions of Jerusalem and refugees Palestinians were left reeling by the Israelis' demand to share East Jerusalem including the holy site of Al-Aqsa Mosque, while illegally Israeli-controlled West Jerusalem was not even open for discussion. Furthermore they were, it was explained, expected to forgo the inalienable right of refugee return, which the Israelis wrote off as being a "war for the destruction of Israel."

President Arafat managed to withstand enormous American pressure and kept his signature away from any document or memorandum, realizing that the price of going down in history as the one who closed such a deal was too high, not only in terms of conceding more Palestinian rights but also with regard to his own personal future.

The Camp David summit was premature and built on the aspirations of Barak and Clinton, both running out of time in their respective roles. Its failure was not a surprise but yet more evidence that the Israelis were stuck with the unbending mentality of the occupier and that the

US were, rather than exerting any influence intended to change this, backing their Israeli ally's position unconditionally.

Al-Aqsa Intifada

To understand the Al-Aqsa Intifada one must comprehend that Palestinians had waited for seven long years for the myriad promises made to materialize. In hoping for the fulfillment of these goals, they accepted postponements, delays, the renegotiation of formerly agreed accords, broken commitments, and the actuality of an ongoing occupation affecting every aspect of their daily lives. Deep frustration over the realization that nothing seemed to come out of their innumerable sacrifices and that the endless wait for a life in dignity, coupled with disillusionment and the growing fear of watching their future evaporate before them, created a mood that needed only a spark to inflame.

This spark was the provocative visit, with the approval of the Barak government, of Ariel Sharon, the head of the Likud opposition party, accompanied by thousands of soldiers, to the Haram Ash-Sharif compound on 28 September 2000. Almost seven months have passed since the outbreak of violence that followed the visit and swept throughout the West Bank and Gaza, and Palestinians are still paying a heavy price with over 400 dead to date and thousands injured. For them, the new Intifada is an uprising against the prolonged occupation with all its humiliations and fears and with no end in sight. The Israelis, again, refuse to see the Palestinians' despair as a result of this absence of hope, again distancing themselves from any acceptance of their role in creating, let alone exacerbating a regional crisis.

Sharon's Phase

The election of Ariel Sharon was an Israeli message delivered against Barak's policies and his failure in fulfilling any of his election promises in terms of domestic reforms, reaching a peaceful arrangement with the Syrians, or ending the conflict with the Palestinians. It was an Israeli vote against Arafat, whom it seems they are incapable of viewing in terms of a partner for a political settlement, and it was a vote against the peace scenarios, which had taken a "dangerous" turn at Camp David, where Barak's proposals seemed for many Israelis too concessionary. It was also a vote in search of a security shield (in the person of Sharon) out of fear of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which had rocked the Israeli left into an acquiescent silence, and a vote reflecting the deep inner division in Israel and its crisis of leadership, illustrating at once the absence of any viable vision in Israel of a settlement with the Palestinians..

Sharon's coalition government, in spite of the many contradictions and conflicts amongst its members, aims to develop a unified Israeli position in the face of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, crippling Arafat and the Fateh leadership, if not destroying the PA's authority altogether, under the banner of "halting violence against the Jewish state." To do so, Sharon introduced a 100-day plan to re-shape Israeli exclusive control in the OPT and enforcing a policy of containment by dividing and separating the territory and its people through roadblocks and checkpoints aimed at dictating his conditions to the Palestinians and their leadership.

Sharon's long-standing ambitions are also reflected in his immediately activated policies on Jerusalem, where he is establishing a military presence within the holy site of Al-Aqsa mosque and encouraging settlers to step up their activities nearby in the old city's Burj Al-Laqlaq area, the Silwan and Ras Al-Amud neighborhoods, the enormous Jaba' Abu Ghneim settlement, as well as upon the newly planned Giva'ot settlement near Nahaleen village. Sharon's 'ceasefire terms' consist of a demand that Arafat quell the Intifada and arrests and dismantles its activists, before negotiating a long-term transitional arrangement, including a non-belligerency pact. Sharon has made no secret that in his plan for Palestinian-Israeli "coexistence" he would neither dismantle a single settlement, nor withdraw from the Jordan Valley or make any compromise on Jerusalem, refugees or borders issues. The most he is willing to "offer" is a demilitarized Palestinian state on a mere 42% of the West Bank.

Although his election, after seven years of negotiations, was an anti-vote against the many mishaps of the Barak government, it represented a serious and dangerous diversion from the course of peace and coexistence, which is also reflected in a change in Israeli public opinion, that seems to fully support Sharon's actions – as recent polls have demonstrated. For instance, in one poll 71% of those questioned supported the assassination of Palestinian leaders, who are connected to "terrorist acts", and 73% support economic sanctions against the Palestinians. Some 62% said that it was impossible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.¹ Another poll² revealed that the Israelis' view of the Palestinians has worsened since the outbreak of the Intifada, with 74% of those questioned favoring unilateral separation.

Sharon is also reassured by Israel's main ally, the US, who have adopted a hands-off approach to Sharon's agenda, being - despite their lengthy commitment to the strategic alliance with Israel and non-stop financial and military support - unaccustomed to constructing or developing their strategies according to short-term or transitional arrangements. Much to the satisfaction of Ariel Sharon, the Bush administration refrained from inviting Arafat to Washington, instead limiting their consultations to Egypt and Jordan.

In his first official trip to Washington Sharon presented his regional agenda, fully backing the new US administration's policy on Iraq, Iran and Libya and requesting the listing of Hizbullah as a 'terrorist organization' as well as a continuation of sanctions on Tehran. As for Syria and Lebanon, Sharon opened the 'Pandora's Box' on water in the region, by branding internal Lebanese infrastructure development a military matter, while he vociferously encouraged US support of Jordan.

Where to? Scenarios

One may wonder for how long Sharon will be able to keep the Israeli public supportive of his military agenda, to contain the Labor Party in a coalition government which lacks an agreed political agenda, and for how long the new US administration will continue to deal with his policies with a 'silk-gloved' approach. Another question is whether the Arab states will continue to limit their involvement to hollow rhetoric if they are pressed to calm an increased anger of the Arab street.

One might hold that, given the current atmosphere in the region and the precedents of history, all the aforementioned parties will find themselves in one way or another, and to varying degrees, directing their discontent against Sharon personally as well as against his military attacks. Acknowledging this environment would lead us to expect that Sharon's government will be short-lived. This is a fact he might be well aware of and which would explain the speed with which he has implemented his "doctrine". This doctrine yields a regional strategy designed to make it excruciatingly difficult, if not impossible, to bring about any political settlement establishing a Palestinian state, viable, sovereign and strong enough to survive. Sharon's regional energies are focused upon redeveloping the security alliance with Jordan, which is to continue its service as a buffer state between Israel and Iraq & Iran. Sharon appears to calculate, that Jordan, can be rendered both obliged and willing to absorb Palestinian refugees in exchange for material aid from the US and EU. Notable in this regard was Sharon's marked advocacy during his initial Washington trip of the need for the US to maintain and strengthen its support for Jordan in the fields of financial aid, security coordination and arms.

Sharon's overriding concern is to put in place an arrangement which will govern, if not bind, subsequent Israeli governments, be they right, left or center-party led, to this agenda of smothering Palestinians beneath a regional alliance which radically distances the notion of a future Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Sharon, it would appear, will leave office content if he renders any future full-scale settlement between the two sides unimaginable and achieves his goal of instead reconstituting Jordan's security alliance with Israel; challenging thereby also Beirut and Damascus to consider settling Palestinian refugees in their respective states. The

¹ Public opinion poll conducted by the Israeli Dahaf Institute in April 2001.

² Public opinion poll conducted by Yediot Ahronot in April 2001.

yardstick of success for Ariel Sharon will be how far he manages to use his military threats and attacks in the region towards creating a situation that will, as the inherited de facto status, represent as immovable a challenge as possible to those who follow. In this regard, it is not the longevity of his term of office that concerns Ariel Sharon but rather the vigor and scale with which he manages to follow through his “doctrine”.

If we are to see this current crisis lead to such a doctrine’s materialization on the ground – i.e. the realization of Sharon’s goals – we can expect to see Arafat, as a known maestro of tactics, accommodate his position within the reconstituted arrangement between Israel and Jordan and re-play the old ‘game’ in between, as he has so often before, though this time he will be doing so from the OPT between the two states rather than from Jordan, Lebanon or from a distant Tunis. This will run against the will and interest of the Jordanian people who have always been worried about any political settlement being carried out at their expense. They fear, in the long run, a process leading to a de facto ‘Palestinization’ of Jordan in terms of demography, economy and politics. Likewise, this scenario runs against the needs and interests of the Palestinians, who do not seek a substitute homeland and strongly object to any Jordanian affiliation, even in a transitional capacity, and continue to struggle against such possibilities and towards an independent state on their own soil. Having had the limited Palestinian autonomous territory internationally recognized as a “Red Line” not to be crossed by Israeli troops, his legitimacy as head of the PA as well as an acceptance of a Palestinian ‘mini-state’ identity already conferred upon him by the world community, one might suggest that Arafat will feel that he has ‘little to lose’ beyond the ongoing sacrifices of the Palestinian people and that as a result he will play tactically for the financial, political and diplomatic benefits available, if only to again confirm his survival against adversity. Indeed, Arafat’s response to current Israeli tactics might be seen as an acceptance, albeit unwillingly, of Sharon’s conditions for the cessation of the military confrontation, in order to maintain his role as the only partner in current and future scenarios. In this regard Arafat continues to fear a Jordan - Israel arrangement “behind his back”, for he trusts neither party and fears their search for an alternative partner and their projected planning for governing Palestinians in a post-Arafat era.

Another, political scenario is that the Intifada will eventually influence Israeli public opinion into realizing that Sharon’s plans are accelerating an apartheid system and only paving the way for continuous hate and confrontation between the two people. This could alert the Labor Party to their folly in joining Sharon’s government and lead them to seek a way out in order to save their party from collapse. At the same time an awakening of the peace movement and its activists on both sides might lead to renewed communication and dialogue leading in turn to the re-establishment of bridges between the sides and the exertion of pressure upon the Israeli government to step up its efforts to halt settlement activities and resume the search for common ground. In this regard it is worth remembering that it was Israeli public opinion which, during the first Intifada, led their leaders to meet the Palestinians and move towards the Madrid talks. What they might hope to achieve in the shorter-term is the creation of increased awareness of the severity of the situation on the ground as well as of the potential long-term detriments to both sides of allowing current Israeli policies to continue unchecked. In doing so they can play a part in opening the window for the possible acceptance by the EU and US of the deployment of international forces – not only to protect the Palestinians but to separate the two people in preparation for a new chapter.

Any future Israeli government will have to seriously consider two factors; one being the need to immediately freeze all settlement activity and the other being the Arab Summit initiative put forward in March 2001. This Arab initiative represents the formulation of a comprehensive conflict management and resolution timetable supported by the US, EU and the Palestinians in the absence of any alternative ideas.

The Palestinian leadership has long been demanding such intervention from the Arab side – the translation of Arab verbal and financial commitments into actions. The Jordanian-Egyptian initiative puts forth four areas of focus, as reported in Israel’s *Ha’aretz*³ newspaper. The first being “steps to end the current crisis between Israel and the Palestinian Authority...[by

³ Ha’aretz, April 19th, 2001 “The Jordanian-Egyptian Proposal”

implementing] the understandings reached at the Sharm Esh-Sheikh Summit in October 2000.” The second area of focus deals with “confidence building measures...to restore trust through the faithful implementation of their commitments as agreed...in the signed agreements.” The third area covers “rebuilding the negotiating process...on all items on the agenda for the permanent status negotiations including: Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, borders, settlements, security and water.” Finally, “it is proposed that the sponsors of the peace process; the EU, Egypt, Jordan and the Secretary General of the UN shall monitor this implementation and its progress.”

Israel’s first reaction was a negative one because the plan sets a timetable for the attainment of a final agreement. However, Israel will surely be coerced into reconsidering, coming under pressure from discontent Labor Party cabinet members, the US, and EU who have seen it, as a way out of the current vicious circle of violence and back to the negotiating track. The Jordanian-Egyptian initiative seeks to contain the current confrontation and halt it from spreading to the region. It fits with the US position advocating an Arab umbrella for the negotiations before any direct US involvement, a new US position which has found immediate expression in two decisions; the withdrawal of the high profile CIA involvement in security talks with both parties and the decision to “severely reduce their [military] presence” in the Sinai peninsula.

Jordan, spurred by an urgent interest in preventing the Intifada from spreading across the river, has played a major role in getting such an Arab initiative off the ground, not least since King Abdullah assumed the position of head of the Arab Summit for the coming year and took up a mandate from the Arab League to begin mediating in a regional conflict (Iraq-Kuwait). Vitally, Egypt has endorsed this role and blessed Jordanian shuttle diplomacy between Israel and the Palestinians.

Jordan’s interests in joining Egypt as the ‘shepherd’ for the negotiation journey toward Palestinian-Israeli settlement stem from the need to use such an opportunity to arrest the serious and potentially devastating deterioration of its economy as well as to contain mounting frustration and anger in Jordanian society, where the possibility of the spread of the crisis is greatest. It is thus quite conceivable that Jordan will emerge from the sidelines to the fore of the stage, facilitating future Palestinian-Israeli talks. To do so without enflaming Palestinian resistance Jordan has to confirm again that this responsibility is limited, temporary and reflects no ambition to re-govern the Palestinians but rather reflects regional ‘real-politick’ – being the hope of ensuring Jordanian security and economic stability and at the same time assisting their Palestinian “brothers” achieve an independent state on their own national soil in Palestine. Of this the Jordanians will be under pressure to convince the Palestinians, in order that their continuous fear and mistrust of Jordan’s intentions not be allowed to derail such an initiative. Washington, in a sign of their support for this latest Jordanian ‘mission’, has already moved swiftly to transfer 75 \$US million additional economic aid, as well as US \$35 million in military aid, while supporting Jordan further by dusting off and hastening to place before congress a previously shelved Free Trade Agreement between the US and the Hashemite Kingdom.

The Palestinians risk finding themselves caught between Israel’s militarily enforced scenario and an Arab political initiative maneuvered, if not developed, by Jordan for its own sake and that of its future relations with Israel and the US. With this in mind it is likely that, should this scenario emerge, the Palestinians will insist that the equal, shared role of Egypt be stressed as a counterbalance, if not demand the EU and UN Secretary General take up clear positions of involvement according to the final point of the initiative. It would appear that this Arab initiative will be the likely station at this crossroads and that all parties concerned will use it for their own different interests and goals as it in turn leads us toward both expected and, as usual, unpredictable futures.

In conclusion, some words of realism concerning the situation on the ground must be uttered. One cannot ignore the fear and the depth of hatred and resentment that has been reconstituted between Palestinians and Israelis over the last year, nor the increasingly militia-like status of the armed settler movement in the OPT or the degree to which the rehabilitation of the Palestinian resistance movement has developed. The near certainty of a further

prolonged period of ongoing confrontation throughout the territories will mean the continuation of the 'Lebanonization' of the conflict. Meanwhile the US, which seeks to prevent the conflict spreading regionally, will soon be seen engaged in diplomatic shuttling between the Palestinians and Israel as well as to Arab capitals. Again though it will take a long time before any Israeli government, whether it be Sharon's or his successor's will bring into effect any plan meeting the Palestinian need to end the occupation and achieve independent statehood. Throughout the interim Palestinians will remain under pressure to survive through adaptation as each new likelihood is floated and the defining regional and foreign powers formulate their positions, before eventually reviving the road to the next chapter of the conflict.