

## Introduction

Palestine has enjoyed geographic, religious, and political centrality in the Middle East and has since the beginning of the last century been vulnerable to the plans and ambitions of foreign powers. The resulting conflicts have led to the dispersal and prolonged suffering of the Palestinian people, and during the past eight decades in particular the Palestinian people have fought continuously to defend their internationally recognized rights to freedom and independence.

The ambitions and policies of the various external powers involved over the years have had an undeniable impact on inter-Arab relations, and on the international relations of Arab states. They have also had a direct effect on shaping the history of Palestine and the evolution of its future. Despite this external pressure, the Palestinians have succeeded in defending and maintaining their Arab identity and political presence by organizing socio-economic institutions and a political infrastructure which have allowed them to challenge the power of various conquerors in the ongoing national struggle. Having legitimate representation forced other parties to recognize and engage with them despite attempts to deny them their rights to self-determination and national independence.

This volume is one of a series that organizes key political documents covering the time from the pre-Ottoman period to 2007. This volume covers the birth of the Road Map and the period leading up to the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. This brief introduction outlines the history of this period to provide a framework to guide the reader to the historical context of the papers.

### *The Road Map and Stagnating Peace*

Volume VII picks up the narrative in October of 2002 as Palestine remained in a state of disarray. The latest “Road Map for Peace” was introduced in October and was unofficially endorsed. The early focus of the plan was on reform and recovery within the Palestinian economic and political systems to be accompanied by a halt to Israeli settlement activity and the beginning of withdrawal. Three different drafts would be drawn up and agreed to by the end of the year.

As international observers, most notably the members of the Middle East Quartet, worked to break the impasse between the Palestinians and Israelis, internal bickering continued to swell within the Palestinian political structure. In March, Mahmoud Abbas was appointed to the role of Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority by Yasser Arafat and inherited a number of setbacks. The United States had frozen all aid to the Palestinians and begun its war in Iraq, and Palestinians were already losing confidence in the empty promises of the road map. By September, Prime Minister Abbas had already resigned his post and been replaced by Ahmed Qrei’a, who had been close to Arafat during Oslo and Camp David.

In the shadow of the growing separation wall in the West Bank, there was little change in the *status quo* during the latter half of 2003. The Geneva Accord process that was launched in December was received coldly by the Israelis and met with only marginal support in Palestinian society. The PLC continued to move forward with an all-new cabinet and a new

speaker. More importantly, Prime Minister Sharon came to the Knesset with his revised Unilateral Disengagement Plan in January of 2004 and was able to win more support. Though many people on both sides were skeptical of the plan and its motives, it was approved by the Israelis and ostensibly gave the PA an opening to begin discussing Gaza security arrangements with Egypt. US President George W. Bush endorsed the plan, though by May he was calling the establishment of a Palestinian state “not likely.”

Palestinians continued to see their situation regress in the latter half of 2004. Marwan Barghouti, a popular Fateh and resistance leader who rose to prominence during the *Intifadas*, was convicted and given five consecutive life sentences by an Israeli court in June. He had put up no defense, and his release remains a point of contention between Israelis and Palestinians. In July, a decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled the Israeli separation barrier to be illegal and called for its immediate destruction. A subsequent declaration by the UN General Assembly demanded that Israel comply with the ICJ ruling.

#### ***Palestinian Politics Post-Arafat***

The loss of President Yasser Arafat in November of 2004 was a sever blow to Palestinians. Though his death was not a surprise given his deteriorating health, it was still a shock to the people whose struggle he had embodied for almost three decades. Mahmoud Abbas stepped in to head the PLO as international observers attempted to frame the situation as a chance to finally make peace between the Israelis and the mourning Palestinians. At the same time, Hamas made its first appearance in municipal elections, and we saw the first signs of the movement’s rising popularity among the Palestinian electorate.

In hindsight, the most important storyline from the first half of 2005 was the increasing tension between Fateh and Hamas. The major round of municipal elections that was held in May solidified Hamas’ place as the main foil to Fateh. The superior strategy and organization of Hamas contributed to the success of its first foray into electoral politics, while Fateh’s own disorganization doomed it to a weak performance. Even with the looming disengagement and the Israeli push to complete the separation barrier around East Jerusalem, Hamas’ chances in the upcoming PLC elections remained at the forefront of the Palestinian political discussion. To buy himself and his party more time, President Abbas announced a decision to postpone those elections until January 2006.

#### ***A Final Note***

Although we have endeavored to make this publication as reader/user friendly as possible, one should be aware that there is some inconsistency in terms of the spelling of non-English words - names and places (such as Haram Ash-Sharif or *Intifada*) – since we adhered, wherever possible, to the original version rather than apply our usual spelling rules. It is for the same reason that the volumes contain a number of minor typographical errors such as the omission of apostrophes, inconsistent capitalization, and spelling mistakes found in the originals.

Footnotes included in the volumes - excluding those marked “the ed.” - are mostly those that appeared in the original texts though the readership note that the numbering will not necessarily be accordance with the original version.