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Visions of the Endgame

A strategy to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict swiftly to an end

Tony Klug

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Fabian Society
11 Dartmouth Street
London SW1H 9BN
www.fabian-society.org.uk

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About the author

Dr Tony Klug is an international relations specialist who has written widely about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for many years and has been advocating the two-state idea as the framework for a settlement since the early 1970s. He is a special advisor on the Middle East to the Oxford Research Group, co-chair of the Arab-Jewish Forum and author of the Fabian Freethinking Paper, 'How peace broke out in the Middle East: a short history of the future' http://fabians.org.uk/images/stories/pdfs/peace_mideast.pdf

tonyklug@compuserve.com

Comments on 'Visions of the Endgame'

"Visions of the Endgame is a must-read. The paper bears the characteristic hallmarks of Tony Klug's incisive thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and support for a viable two state outcome, which he was one of the first to advocate. His proposal is an uncompromising catalyst at a critical moment in the Middle East."

– Professor Oliver Ramsbotham, Emeritus Professor of Conflict Resolution, University of Bradford.

"Tony Klug, with his long experience and deep insight, once again shows us how peace could pragmatically break out in the Middle East. With its innovative and balanced approach, his proposed strategy could be the breakthrough that the Obama administration and the wider international community have desperately been seeking."

– Lord Andrew Stone

"As always, Tony Klug's approach to this tragedy is thoughtful and original."

– Professor Shlomo Ben-Ami, former Israeli foreign minister

"Once again Tony Klug has outdone the experts in how to unravel the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Visions of the Endgame, Klug provides the most probable approach the Quartet can utilise to resolve the conflict during the first term of President Obama. The White House should seriously consider the proposed approach."

– Hanna Siniora, former advisor to President Arafat and member of the Palestinian National Council

"This brilliantly clear-sighted paper is, to my mind, the wisest assessment of the senseless conflict that has for so long dominated the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. With endless insight, it debunks the many myths on both sides. I now pray that it will quickly find its way to Obama's desk, inspire him with its wisdom and cause him to act immediately according to its proposals."

– Moris Farhi, award-winning writer and vice president of International PEN, the worldwide association of writers

"This is of the very high standard we have come to expect from Tony Klug and makes for a fascinating read. I hope President Obama will listen."

– Professor Donald Sassoon, Professor of Comparative European History, Queen Mary University of London.

Summary

This Fabian Freethinking paper argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is on the verge of becoming irresolvable but that President Obama's first term offers a final opportunity to settle it.

Attempts to revive sham negotiations between the reluctant parties or to build trust between an occupying authority and an occupied people are a waste of effort. The author explores the complex web of imperatives underlying the conflict and warns that the toxins of this quintessentially twentieth century quarrel could spill over and poison an already heavily challenged twenty-first century.

The best way to avoid such a calamity is swift, robust, internationally led action based on clear goals and an effective enforcement mechanism. 'Visions of the Endgame' describes a more assertive approach that circumvents the stalemate, calls the bluff of all parties and catalyses a new dynamic.

The paper details three proposed moves, led by the Quartet (the US, UN, EU and Russia), to effectively resolve the conflict within the first term of the Obama administration:

1. The conflicting parties are invited to tender their realistic visions of the endgame within a brief fixed time-period, based on two viable states and a comprehensive regional peace.

2. Whether the deadline is observed or not, the Quartet then formulates a definitive international plan to end the conflict and to settle the wider Arab-Israeli issues.

3. The Quartet issues its definitive plan, including a schedule of concrete interim targets, with powerful inducements for each party at each timetabled step. Maintaining a strong leadership role, the Quartet actively presides over the plan's implementation.

The author, who first called for the two-state framework nearly 40 years ago, warns that if this final opportunity is not quickly seized, the region could soon descend into indefinite strife with deeply troubling global ramifications.

1 | The global imperative

"We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now"
– Martin Luther King

A succession of flawed peace initiatives has left the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the verge of becoming irresolvable. The election to the US presidency of the inspirational Barack Obama has providentially opened up a belated opportunity to bring the dispute swiftly to an end – which is now the only way of resolving it. With this in mind, a robust international strategy needs to be devised and boldly pursued.

As the conflict is prone to pollute international relations, and since the parties are manifestly unable to resolve it themselves, the international community has both a right and obligation to act quickly and decisively, an intervention that would almost certainly be welcomed, overtly or covertly, by the traumatized mass of Palestinians and Israelis desperate for a way out of their seemingly intractable problem. While a measure of initial resistance – some of it possibly intense - may be anticipated, it will have to be overcome with whatever level of persuasion it takes.

We live in a world in which the globalization of local troubles is becoming commonplace. Nowhere is this truer than for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There was a time when the wider Middle East could be divided into discrete, more-or-less self-contained, patches with few and limited connections between and beyond them. But today if the

proverbial butterfly flaps its wings in Gaza, it does not take long for the reverberations to be felt in Karachi, Kabul, Copenhagen and California.

As the global superpower, the United States potentially has a vital role to play as an honest broker in regional conflicts. Yet, in recent years, whether under Democratic or Republican leadership, it largely forsook this role in relation to the predominant conflict in the Middle East by almost totally allying its policies with the wishes (not necessarily the best interests) of the government of the day of one of the antagonistic parties. This was starkly exemplified by the disastrously unsuccessful Israeli-Palestinian summit at Camp David in 2000 where all proposals put forward by the US were reportedly co-ordinated in advance with the Israeli delegation. Such an approach could hardly have been more different from the independent and productive role the same Clinton administration played in the transition to peace in Northern Ireland - to the ultimate benefit and gratitude of almost all the conflicting parties.

It is normal for close allies with overlapping interests not always to see eye to eye. The perspective of a combatant is not and cannot be exactly the same as the perspective of an outside party with an aspirant mediation role in the conflict. Yet, for the eight years of the Bush administration - often described as the most pro-Israel presidency in history - the US nailed its political sail tightly to Israel's short-term mast, to the detriment of the longer-term interests and reputations of both countries. The US could have been a better friend to Israel, as Israel could have been a better friend to the US. Now is an opportune time for both to make amends.

Despite the heart-warming assurances of Israeli politicians to its own people, the international standing of Israel and Israelis, thanks largely to the policies of recent years, is plunging new depths and, with the advent of the new right-wing coalition, is set to plunge still further. Movements to boycott the Jewish state are gathering pace and questions about its 'right to exist' are being innocently raised by a young, politically maturing generation that knows little of the history of the two peoples but knows quite a lot about the misery of current events. It is strongly

in Israel's long-term interests to stop the rot by speedily ending its protracted occupation of Palestinian lands – an occupation that has been brutalizing the occupier as well as the occupied - and concluding a peace agreement with the wider Arab region while the opportunity remains alive.

Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, despite his lamentable failures in the peacemaking sphere, expressed precisely this view in the wake of the Annapolis conference of November 2007, when he declared that failure to negotiate a two-state solution with the Palestinians would mean "the state of Israel is finished". Elaborating on this theme the following year, he held that a deal would necessarily entail withdrawing from almost all the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

Equally, it is plainly in the interests of the US to end its state of alienation in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Successful mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would go a long way towards undermining the ability of fundamentalist 'jihadist' groups to play on anti-American sentiment in Muslim circles. Ultimately, the long-term interests of the US, Israel and the Palestinians coincide but it is up to the US government to bring them into alignment.

To lay the principal blame for the US leadership's short-sightedness or lack of political will on the hard-line pro-Israel lobby is to let culpable US presidencies off the hook. More than this, it is to adopt an unwarranted attitude of hopelessness. This is not to downplay the influence of the lobby, but a clearheaded and determined president should be no less able to face down the pro-Israel lobby than other powerful lobbies - and maybe even win over some of its associates. This would not be unprecedented: George Bush Senior, for example, threatened to limit loan guarantees to Israel in 1991 to force Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to attend that year's Madrid peace conference – which reluctantly he did - and to offset expenditure on settlement construction in occupied territory, at least for a while.

In this context, the emergence onto the US political scene of 'J Street' – an essentially 'dovish', predominantly Jewish-led, advocacy group that describes itself as 'pro-Israel, pro-peace' - may also be providential. A strong backer of the two-state formula, J Street, which has attracted the approbation of leading Arab-American bodies, is offering a practical alternative to the more established 'hawkish' lobby group AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) to members of congress eager to brandish their pro-Israel credentials while pursuing a pragmatic peace agenda.

Indicatively, a recent poll conducted by J Street found that more than three-quarters of US Jews support a two-state solution based on the parameters nearly agreed at Taba in 2001. A similar percentage of Jews (78 per cent) voted for Obama as president. Attitudes toward settlement expansion are "highly negative", particularly among Jews who donate to political campaigns (72 per cent in their case). Sixty-nine percent of Jews support the US working with a unified Hamas-PA government to achieve a peace agreement with Israel, precisely the same percentage of Israelis who support their government negotiating with a Palestinian unity government.

Candidate Obama summed up the overall predicament this way in May 2008: "what I think is that this constant wound, that this constant sore, does infect all of our foreign policy. The lack of a resolution to this problem provides an excuse for anti-American militant jihadists to engage in inexcusable actions, and so we have a national-security interest in solving this, and I also believe that Israel has a security interest in solving this because I believe that the status quo is unsustainable".

A rigorous initiative, comprising a judicious mix of participatory and coercive elements, needs to be launched early in the Obama presidency with the aim of attaining substantial, irreversible progress within the first two-to-three years. We cannot afford to replicate the drawn-out methods and repetitive errors of previous efforts. Failure this time will effectively close the door on hope and bring the alternative of endless strife perilously closer.

2 | The regional imperatives

"Things do not happen. Things are made to happen"
– John F Kennedy

To end the conflict, both the destination and the strategy have to be right. For some three decades following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, there was neither a viable nor a commonly agreed destination. Consequently, no matter what strategy may have been proposed, it could not have brought about a solution.

To the extent that the conflicting parties projected eventual outcomes during this period – the Allon Plan and 'Jordanian option' for the Israelis, a version of the 'one-state' idea for the Palestinians, Security Council Resolution 242 for the international community - they were either deficient or misconceived. The common flaw was their failure to respond to the key question at the heart of the conflict: how to resolve a bitter clash between two charismatic national movements? To Resolution 242, the Palestinians were just homeless refugees, not a stateless nation. To the PLO charter, the Jews were merely a religious minority, to be treated accordingly. To Israel's former prime minister Golda Meir, "it was not as though there was a Palestinian people…they did not exist".

The one-state model in South Africa, built on the ashes of apartheid, has been projected in some circles as a possible prototype for Israel/Palestine to follow. Analogies are sometimes drawn too with

Northern Ireland, Algeria, India/Pakistan, Cyprus, East Timor, Sri Lanka and other international or historical trouble spots. However, each conflict has its own peculiar character and a solution needs to spring from within rather than be transplanted from without. To be sustainable, it has to be in harmony with the conflicting parties' basic, minimum aspirations, even if not with their ideal ambitions. South Africa was essentially a civil rights struggle. Israel/Palestine is primarily a clash of two national movements (even if there is a heavy-duty civil rights dimension as well) and any proposal that disregards either national imperative - let alone both of them - is incongruous and certain to fail. The 'here's a solution, where's the problem?' approach cannot work.

Taking their cue from the deepest aspirations of the two peoples and the practical realities confronting them, a number of individuals from different countries, including this writer, began to advocate the two-state formula in the wake of the 1967 war. Regrettably, it took until the turn of the century for a strong international consensus – progressively backed by majority Israeli and Palestinian opinion - to emerge in support of two viable states and a comprehensive regional peace, as subsequently reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. Thirty vital years had been squandered, but finally the international community got the destination essentially right.

But still it had to get the strategy right. This it has persistently failed to do. Despite their respective merits, the range of initiatives – from the Oslo process, through the Road Map, the Annapolis process and any one of the other dead-end, stillborn or toothless plans - rested on too many doubtful assumptions or were too vague about the objectives or let the parties too easily off the hook through a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. The ultimate failure in each case was only to be expected.

There is a limit to how many times expectations can be raised and then dashed and we are now very close to that limit. It is not certain that hope could survive another breakdown. Chronic disenchantment has set in and the hitherto consensual destination is now under threat.

A growing number of Palestinians who for many years had

campaigned for the two-state formula (adopted as official PLO policy in 1988) as the pragmatic solution to the conflict, have more recently started to embrace the view that pragmatism now favours one state for both peoples, even if it entails engaging in a bitter long-term struggle with uncertain consequences and reaching for an objective they don't necessarily favour, have not clearly thought through or truly believe is achievable. This drift in attitude is the ineluctable consequence of Israeli practices on the ground, notably the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements – a pre-eminent confidence-shattering measure - and the concomitant shrinking of the space for the putative Palestinian state.

In parallel, Hamas rockets which, as intended, have terrorized the population of southern Israel for years, have deepened the mood among Israelis that peace-making is futile. Enthusiasm for two states – including within the disillusioned and fragmented Israeli peace camp - has markedly declined as evidenced by the sharp swing to the hawkish right in the February 2009 election. Indeed, 'peace' itself has virtually become a four-letter word.

In parallel, there are indications that the commitment of Arab countries to their own, Saudi-originated, peace initiative is fading in the light of the absence of Israeli encouragement for the plan and, more recently, the devastating military onslaught on Gaza that, in the eyes of many people in the region and around the world, crossed a threshold, even if this is not fully grasped within Israel. Moreover, young Egyptians are increasingly questioning the rectitude and value of their country's 30-year peace treaty with Israel. However, as suggested, there is little doubt that if a genuine, viable two-state option were imminently on offer, the vast majority of Palestinians and Israelis would eagerly seize the opportunity, with the fulsome backing of neighbouring states. Even Hamas has more-than-once indicated its preparedness to do a deal based on the pre-June 1967 borders.

However, a two-state outcome today could hardly be identical to the model envisaged in the years immediately following the 1967 war when there was just a smattering of Jewish settlers inhabiting the West Bank,

compared with close to half a million currently (including in East Jerusalem). Taking into account the contemporary realities on the ground and the changing aspirations and needs of both populations, a two-state rubric today would inevitably have some hybrid two-state/one-state elements.

Ideally, the two projected states would have close relations and develop a range of horizontal ties. However, in both principle and practice, this is no more a reason for their national and state identities to be dismantled than it is for the countries of the European Union or, even more compellingly, for the constituent states of Benelux, in which Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have for many years been very closely integrated in various ways.

It is sometimes said that the time is not ripe for a final settlement, as if a more auspicious moment is lurking around the corner. Yet, if the two-state formula and comprehensive regional peace were indeed to be abandoned as the objects of a peace process, we will have come full circle - back to no agreed destination. In that case, once again, no strategy, however apparently innovative, would be able to salvage it. The window will have shut tight.

A breakdown of that magnitude would destabilize the region and have deeply troubling consequences. One such consequence – a rather more likely development than the abrupt formation of a unified harmonious state – may be the eruption of a third intifada in the form of a Palestinian secessionist movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, ushering in an epoch of violence (probably primarily targeted at settlers) and counter-violence, quite possibly culminating eventually in two separate states. In other words, the most likely alternative to a two-state outcome is a two-state outcome - but one fashioned by disaster rather than design.

Meanwhile, the region would ignite, passions would inflame and international opinion would become ever more polarized, leading to a sharpening of support for the notion and prospective reality of a 'clash of civilizations', a prospect that may be brought closer by an urge to

'finish the job' against Hamas in Gaza or, in extremis, by a reckless military attack on Iran by an Israeli government feeling increasingly misunderstood, threatened and abandoned, and liable to be handed one pretext after another by a spectacularly confrontational Iranian regime.

Such developments could trigger an upsurge in both anti-Arab/Muslim and anti-Jewish/western sentiment (they often go hand-in-hand). Jewish communities around the world that continue to demonstrate their unswerving solidarity with Israel's actions and policies may find themselves increasingly isolated, divided, friendless and under attack, fertile ground for sinister antisemitic forces again to peddle their noxious wares.

In sum, if this quintessentially 20th century conflict is left to fester, its toxins could end up poisoning the 21st century too.

3 | The strategy imperatives

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek"
– Barack Obama

In calling for firm action to solve the immense economic problems facing his country, US President Obama has criticized the idea "that we can meet our enormous tests with half steps and piecemeal measures" and, in an echo of Albert Einstein, has warned "we can't afford to … resort to the same failed ideas that got us into this mess in the first place". These aphorisms apply equally to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. It is time to bite the bullet and call all bluffs. We no longer have the luxury to rearrange the deckchairs or embroider the upholstery.

The compelling need is for a fresh international strategy that is not just capable of ending the conflict but promptly proceeds to do so. Indeed, the only way to restore confidence in the destination is to move rapidly towards it. There is no place for old ideas and methods – however refashioned - whose misconceptions and delusions have helped to bring about the present predicament.

A characteristic past delusion was a presumption of basic goodwill between the parties and a common commitment to a shared future goal. Another was the belief that genuine trust can successfully be built incrementally and sustained prior to and as a prerequisite of a peace settlement.

A third was the conviction that the termination of all violence is fundamental to ending a military occupation rather than the other way around. A fourth was the notion that playing off one Palestinian faction against another would advance peace. A fifth delusion was the idea that encouraging direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations was necessarily and always beneficial rather than mere - and maybe harmful - showcasing, particularly bearing in mind the innately unequal status of the negotiating parties. Indeed, the principal role negotiations have played post-Taba has been to raise hope and then, with their predictable break down, to intensify the levels of despair.

Proposals for half-way houses such as a 'shelf agreement', 'economic peace', 'provisional state' or 'provisional borders' similarly deserve short shrift. They are little more than devices for putting off a final settlement to the indefinite future. Depending on the circumstances, this may be true for an international conference too and also for a further summit of the principal parties. A process is of no value in itself. It is only worthwhile if it can be shown how it would lead substantively and with minimal delay to the aforementioned consensual destination, and does so.

A serious strategy needs to have a clear horizon with concrete objectives, and tangible targets en route, and be robust enough not to be derailed by the first atrocity or be disrupted by the delaying tactics of any party. Unlike previous plans, notably the Road Map under which the international community was to 'monitor', 'evaluate', 'assist' and 'facilitate', the new strategy will need an effective enforcement mechanism, with strong inducements.

4 | The ideological imperatives

"If you were born where they were born and you were taught what they were taught, you'd believe what they believe"
– attributed to Abraham Lincoln.

Both Israel and Hamas are prone to present their struggle as a battle between the virtuous and the wicked. Thus, while one side demands the destruction of the 'terrorist infrastructure', the other looks forward to the eradication of the 'Zionist entity'. However, destroying the 'terrorist infrastructure' is, in effect, code for excluding a major political current within the Palestinian movement (in the past the PLO, nowadays Hamas) from involvement in determining the endgame, just as eradicating the 'Zionist entity' is a euphemism for dismantling the state of Israel as the embodiment of a Jewish national movement. Not only will a strategy based on either aim fail to bring peace nearer – the mutual threats serving rather to increase the fear factor on both sides and fomenting a hardening of attitudes - but it would foreshadow a prolonged period of diplomatic stagnation and further rounds of mutual atrocities, as we have seen time and again.

A future international strategy needs to steer clear of both these imperatives no matter how convinced the belligerent parties are about the rightness and righteousness of their respective causes. An approach that construes the battle between Israel and Hamas as a local theatre of

the global 'war on terror' runs the serious risk of turning it into one. As the victorious party in the Oslo-sponsored, internationally validated democratic election of 2006, Hamas - however distasteful some of its standpoints may be - needed but was denied breathing space to develop politically (which, guardedly, it has nevertheless been doing), and for its own internal tensions and divisions to play themselves out and mature.

A strategy aimed at driving Hamas from power in Gaza – and attempting forcefully to replace it with the party it convincingly defeated at the polls - may eventually provoke it into abandoning the political path altogether and revert to its more belligerent demands and violent deportment. Or it may give way to 'jihadist' forces, including al-Qaida whose advances it has so far rejected.

On the other hand, to the extent that it is serious about being an actor in the political arena and is allowed to do so, some of Hamas's stances are untenable in the medium-to-long term. The question then is not if they will modify and eventually abandon their more extreme positions or honour international agreements signed by their predecessors, but the manner and timing of this and the way other actors use their influence to advance or retard this trend.

One implication is that Hamas, as a major combatant, needs to be included de facto in any peace moves. This would not require official diplomatic recognition or the abandoning of the Quartet's three stipulations of renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and honouring previous accords, but rather to consider them as projected products of a peace process. To continue to insist on them as pre-conditions can only impede such a process. (This said, unilaterally abrogating the appallingly anti-semitic sections of its charter - a bearing judiciously avoided by the historical PLO charter - would be a commendable, smart and timely gesture on the part of Hamas.)

In a similar vein, demands that Syria must curb its backing for Hamas and Hizbullah and be more cooperative with the west regarding Iraq, Iran and Lebanon are more likely to be met as part of a comprehensive deal that includes progress towards economic and

diplomatic normalization and the return of the Golan Heights than as rigid prerequisites for the easing of US sanctions.

A second implication is that even if Israel, for its own reasons as a direct participant in the conflict, persists with its policy of isolating and destabilizing Hamas and the territory it governs, the international community has broader reasons to take an independent line and start to engage constructively with the Islamic group. In the face of huge logistical and other practical day-to-day problems in running and rebuilding Gaza, including the provision of vital basic services and renovating the economy, bypassing the de facto government instead of working with it is not a viable policy. It is bound to fail. So why waste even more valuable time and resources making-believe differently?

Besides, what is the point of repeatedly rebuilding Palestinian infrastructure, with the assistance of substantial international aid, only for it to be destroyed subsequently as 'terrorist infrastructure' by Israeli military forces? The huge effort of reconstruction is only worth undertaking in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement. Otherwise, it will merely fuel a very vicious circle without end.

5 | The political imperatives

"It always seems impossible until it's done"
– Nelson Mandela

An effective international strategy must be one that is robust enough to achieve its declared goals irrespective of the political complexions of the major parties to the conflict. In other words, it should not be dependent on which political coalition is in power in Israel at any given time or on which political frame is prevalent among the Palestinians. These factors may raise questions of a tactical nature but they cannot be permitted to undermine the elemental strategic approach or delay its advancement. Indeed, tenacious action by the international community may, of itself, spark off new political currents or the formation of new coalitions within these societies that are more conducive to peacemaking.

Ideally, establishing a long-term ceasefire, terminating the blockade of Gaza and ending the military confrontation between Hamas and Israel would precede the launching of the new strategy, and the international community should certainly be ready to intervene determinedly to secure such an agreement. However, it would be prudent to avoid paying any hostage to fortune and, accordingly, the international community should be prepared to press on with its strategy even if it fails to achieve a prior deal over Gaza (or even if hostilities break out

there again). It is always possible that the elements of such a deal may pragmatically fall into place as part of the dynamic that a robust strategy may set in motion.

On the other hand, a total freeze of all further settlement growth – including in the area known as E1, the region between East Jerusalem and the Jewish settlement Maale Adumim which, if developed, would physically cut the Palestinian West Bank in half - should for sure be insisted on at the outset, backed up, if necessary, by firm enforcement measures. The urgency of such an action has been heightened with the disclosure in March 2009 that in excess of 73,000 new housing units are planned for settlements in the West Bank, which could result in a doubling of the number of settlers there. Curiously, some 19,000 of these units are slated for settlements to the east of the separation barrier. Meanwhile, for one reason or another, dozens of demolition orders have been issued against Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem.

To strive for a solution centered on two states while one of those states continues freely to chisel away at the land of the other would make a mockery of the whole process. However, not even this matter should be allowed to impede the progress of the broader strategy. No party should be handed an effective veto as a reward for its delaying tactics.

6 | An Israeli peace strategy?

"If you want to make peace, you don't talk to your friends, you talk to your enemies"
– Moshe Dayan

After many decades of struggle, Israel has been unable to reach the tantalizing goal of peace with its Palestinian neighbours and the wider Arab world. Diverse explanations have been offered for this failure but what is clear is that the search has not been aided by the absence of a coherent Israeli peace strategy, one that might have been formulated – and still could be - as a constructive response to the Arab Peace Initiative. Had such a strategy been in place over the last few years, it is at least possible that recent history may have unfolded differently, particularly in relation to the challenges from Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank.

While recent Israeli governments were committed rhetorically to a two-state solution, the depth of this adherence was defied by the constantly changing facts on the ground - directly or indirectly engineered by these very same governments - and by the lack of any evidence that withdrawal from the occupied West Bank (subject to equitable land swaps) genuinely figured in their plans. An authentic Israeli peace strategy would necessarily include, at its core, an unequivocal avowal to this end. Beyond this, it would voluntarily freeze settlement

expansion – which would mean standing up to the powerful but domestically unpopular settlement lobby - end the siege of Gaza and take in other far-reaching elements. In the interests of advancing a comprehensive peace agreement, it might actively support the re-formation of a Palestinian government of national unity, although its capacity to influence reconciliation among the Palestinian factions would be limited.

It might be more successful, however, in observing a state of non-belligerency with Hamas and pragmatically ensuring the basic needs of the Gaza population were properly met, while pressing for a tacit agreement between Fatah and Hamas not to interfere in the territory currently ruled by the other. With these two rudiments in place, Israel would be free to negotiate the modalities of its withdrawal from the West Bank with the president of the Palestinian Authority and, with appropriate safeguards, promptly implement the agreement, resulting in the establishment of an independent Palestinian state there. The subsequent inclusion of the Gaza Strip would then be essentially an internal Palestinian matter, to be determined between the factions in due course. Such a sequence would take the conflict a long way towards resolution.

In such a scenario, 'appropriate safeguards' may be both the principal obstacle and the main key to progress. Against the background of the missile attacks launched from Lebanon and Gaza following Israel's past withdrawal from these two territories, an Israeli retreat from its current position in the West Bank is unlikely to be endorsed by the Israeli people for as long as they genuinely fear for the security of their country and - part of the political legacy of the suicide bomber - their personal safety. Israelis who contemplate the possible future collapse of the Palestinian Authority and the prospect of an unreconstructed Hamas taking over control of the West Bank won't easily be persuaded to surrender these fears, or consequently the territory.

We are faced with the paradox that while a clear majority of Israelis are ready in principle to give up the West Bank - according to opinion polls over several years – they are not prepared to relinquish the territory to the Palestinians. Equally, there is a visceral Palestinian anxiety

that, following a formal withdrawal, there is nothing to prevent continuing Israeli incursions into their future state.

The role of the Arab Peace Initiative in this context could be crucial, for it gives wider regional backing to a future Israeli-Palestinian settlement. In exchange for Israeli withdrawal from territories captured in 1967, it foresees peace agreements and normal relations between Israel and all Arab countries and security provided for all the states of the region, including the Israeli and Palestinian states. One way of sealing security in the West Bank could be through an agreed security role for Jordan, at least for an initial period. A similar role could be played by Egypt with regard to the Gaza Strip. However, the Palestinians would need to be assured that such arrangements would safeguard their security and sovereignty and not be a step towards returning to the grim situation that prevailed during the 1948 – 1967 period when Jordan and Egypt respectively ruled these territories with a strong fist.

Another possible way of squaring the circle would be for Israel to hand over the West Bank to a US-led international protectorate or trusteeship for a transitional period, with the backing of the UN Security Council. Such a mechanism – which could be extended to embrace the Gaza Strip as well with the agreement of the principal parties - may be an effective way of reconciling the aspirations and fears of both parties and provide a useful breathing space. [Such a proposal has been elaborated in the past by the Oxford Research Group, among others: www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/work/middle_east/internationalprotectorate.pdf]

Like any proposal, these scenarios would not be without their problems. However, they point to the sort of possibilities that could be unlocked were Israel to take a more open and creative approach to ending the conflict. Unfortunately, this can be even less relied upon in the current reality given that the new Israeli government is unlikely even to feign a rhetorical commitment to two states, let alone talk seriously to its adversaries about making peace. Hence the imperative and urgent need for a robust international strategy.

7 | A robust international strategy

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty"
– Winston Churchill

As the history of Middle East peace efforts persuasively demonstrates, the more complex the plan the more opportunities there are to subvert it. In keeping with Einstein's dictum to "make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler", the international strategy proposed here comprises three simple moves over a two-year period, driven by an international authority. It is assumed that the principal engine of the strategy will be the Obama administration and that the Quartet (comprising the US, UN, EU and Russia) will be the principal actor on behalf of the international community. However, the US president may decide to work through a different mechanism or act directly, deploying the combined skills of the eminent Middle East envoy George Mitchell and the redoubtable Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, both figures of international stature.

Move 1

The Quartet, or other suitable international mechanism, invites all principal parties to the conflict to tender their definitive visions of the endgame within a brief fixed time-period (around six months). The invitations caution that the visions must be realistic and consistent with the prevailing international consensus of two viable states and a comprehensive regional peace.

Advisory notes

1. The principal parties are selected pragmatically according to their de facto participation in the conflict and the need for them to be part of the solution. They are viewed primarily as comprising the government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas (as the effective authority in Gaza) and the governments of other neighbouring lands. The Arab League, as the leading regional intergovernmental organization (IGO) and the effective guardian of the Arab Peace Initiative, is also invited to make a submission.

2. A tight timeframe is justified as the process will not be starting from scratch. The issues have been around for many years but time and again the parties have been allowed to duck and dodge the conclusions. Now the storm clouds are gathering and the escape hatches need to be battened down. Of necessity, the entire process has to be compressed in any case to shield its later stages from the intervention of the next presidential election campaign.

3. To underline the purpose of the first phase, the Quartet announces at the outset that in the subsequent phase it will formulate its own definitive plan, drawing in the first instance on the principal parties' proposals, particularly where there is overlap.

4. The Quartet will be informed too by previous agreements, near-agreements, past Security Council resolutions, other international instruments and its own expert-advised assessments.

5. Its main guiding principle, however, will be to reach a solution in quick time that is feasible and sustainable. With this in mind, the parties are advised that any part of their vision that is blatantly unrealistic or impractical or fails to accommodate the genuine minimum requirements of the other parties will not be taken seriously.

6. In urging the parties to meet the stipulated deadline, the Quartet clarifies that it will proceed to the second phase on schedule, whether or not all the parties have made their submissions. Failure to submit on time will not delay the process but the Quartet will be deprived from considering the proposals of the defaulting party when drawing up its final plan.

7. The process may catalyse internal debate within each society at various levels – through such channels as the media, the internet, public and private meetings and so forth - in attempts to feed into and influence official submissions or possibly to put together informal ones. Innovative problem-solving proposals from any quarter could be valuable: civil society groups operating in the world of politics are often less dominated by partisan considerations and can act as energetic dealmakers and problem solvers. Such broad participation could be creative and viewed positively as part of the first phase.

8. Accordingly, unofficial submissions from such sources as well as other governments, IGOs and NGOs are welcomed additionally.

However, there may need to be a method of restricting such submissions on resource grounds.

9. The Quartet will probably need to appoint a panel of carefully selected international experts, backed by adequate support staff, to help guide it in its impending decisions. The experts should be appointed on the basis of their acknowledged expertise and independent judgement rather than through a contrived geographical or political balance. The aim would be to achieve agreement on the panel, not deadlock. The composition of the panel would not be subject to the agreement of the conflicting or other parties.

10. It may be thought that this whole first move could be dispensed with and the international community could simply decree, without delay, the full content of the final basket and proceed to impose it. However, such a crude diktat might arouse the resistance even of those who are broadly sympathetic to the goals of the process and it could generate unnecessary friction.

    Additionally, the important potential momentum that may build up through the participatory phase will be forfeited, 'justice' would not appear to be done, the myriad bluffs would remain uncalled, the potential (albeit limited) for constructive negotiations between the parties and for international mediation would be eliminated, and potentially creative ideas that could emanate from different sources would be excluded (elaborated in move 2 below). The eventual outcome may be quite different in significant – although probably not in fundamental – respects, in ways that could be important to its success.

Move 2

Drawing on the tendered visions, on other sources and on its own expert-advised appraisals, the Quartet formulates its own final definitive plan of the endgame to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wider Arab-Israeli conflict (a further six months).

Advisory notes

1. This phase, similarly, need not take very long. A focused six months should suffice. While each step taken needs to be conducted fairly and judiciously, it is widely understood that in broad terms the final vision is not likely to diverge substantially from the parameters that have been well-known for many years and that have informed nearly all previous plans.

2. The parties are free to negotiate any matter among themselves at any point during this or the previous move, with or without mediation. Any successfully negotiated matter will effectively be assured a place in the definitive plan.

3. Where it is apparent that there remain important points of difference, the Quartet will endeavour to mediate between the parties to narrow the gaps. However, where disagreements remain, the Quartet will retain the ultimate decision about what goes into the definitive plan – whether of a territorial or non-territorial matter – and devise an implementation schedule.

4. Accordingly, the Quartet's final plan will demarcate the destination map, including final state borders and any areas of

shared sovereignty, joint sovereignty, or international or other jurisdiction.

5. The endorsement of the Quartet's plan by the UN Security Council would give it added weight and solid international legality. To optimize the prospect of such an endorsement, it may be advisable to bring China – the only permanent member of the Security Council not directly or indirectly represented in the Quartet - into the loop at an earlier stage.

6. The resolution of some matters where speed is not of the essence and where their determination prior to the end of the main conflict is not vital may need to be judiciously phased. Clear processes for settling such matters will need to be established.

7. The Quartet will consult not only its panel of experts but it will also consider any innovative answers that may have emerged from the process to a range of challenging questions.

   For example:

   – Should an undivided Jerusalem be the capital of both states or should west and east Jerusalem be the respective capitals of each state?
   – Should the two states be entirely independent of each other or should they enter a form of confederation? If so, should Jordan be invited to be part of it?
   – What should the diplomatic, economic, trading, currency, water and energy relations be between the two states?
   – What security arrangements are needed?
   – Might they involve elements or areas of demilitarization?
   – Would an international protectorate have a role to play

(see under section 6 above, 'An Israeli peace strategy?')?

- How much freedom of movement should there be between the two entities? What should the customs arrangements be?
- How would religious worship and access to religious sites in the other state be assured?
- Where should the sovereign and de facto authorities lie over sites sacred to more than one religion?
- What should be the fate of the Palestinian refugees, including their descendants?
- And what of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank?
- Should some or all of the settlers be offered the opportunity to stay in their homes as law-abiding residents, if not citizens, of the Palestinian state (President Arafat was reported in 2001 to be considering such an idea)?
- Should the number of settlers permitted to stay correspond with the number of Palestinian refugees allowed to return to Israel?
- Should there be equitable land swaps and if so where? Should there be a truth and reconciliation process?
- How may a culture of peace be advanced?

And so on and so forth.

8. The eventual peace package may need to be ratified at some point by the respective populations – through election or referendum – but if the entire endeavour is not to be put at risk prematurely, it would be advisable to wait until the process is well advanced and important benefits are already manifest.

Move 3

The Quartet issues its definitive plan to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which includes a timetabled schedule of concrete interim targets, with powerful inducements for each party at each step. Maintaining a strong leadership role throughout, the Quartet actively presides over the plan's implementation (one-to-two years).

Advisory notes

1. Under this strategy, failure to resolve the conflict and revert to the status quo is no longer an option. The default position is shifted dramatically from one of effectively doing nothing to one that proceeds regardless. However, since whatever they have managed to agree among themselves is virtually guaranteed a place in the definitive plan, it's primarily up to the parties themselves to determine what is now left for the Quartet to settle.

2. The Quartet's definitive plan will comprise both the final destination and time-scheduled interim targets - concrete, measurable and achievable - for each party to meet en route to the finishing post. Each interim target will be associated with a package of strong inducements, comprising rewards and penalties, which may be in the financial, economic, diplomatic, cultural, trading, security or other realm and again may be original and creative in nature. What matters is that the inducements are effective. If one party delivers its targets on time and the other fails to do so, the first is rewarded and the second is penalized. Delivering the respective targets is assessed according to the programme and timetable specified for each party, not according to what the other parties do or do not do - a frequently exploited weak point of previous plans. Here, the wriggle room is minimized.

3. With the above in mind, calls for general, indiscriminate sanctions against any of the principal parties would ideally be put on hold. Other considerations apart, they could seriously undermine the potential effectiveness of a comprehensive strategy that critically depends for its success on a targeted package of 'smart' incentives and disincentives that the conflicting parties, by taking the required action, would be capable of achieving or avoiding in practice. Additionally, it may seem incongruous to call for an end to Israel's trade sanctions against Gaza while simultaneously urging global trade sanctions against Israel. Similarly, it may seem odd for Israel to continue its boycott of Gaza while campaigning around the world against a boycott of itself.

4. While attempts may be made by certain factions to disrupt progress through violence, the strategy is designed to proceed forward regardless. Advancing the strategy is not dependent on building superficial goodwill, hollow trust or phoney cooperation, but on the firm leadership and political determination of the international community, led by the Quartet. The potential saboteurs and terrorists should thus be denied the opportunity of exercising a veto, as they have so effectively done in the past. Violence may even be deterred in the knowledge that it will bring no reward to its prospective perpetrators.

5. Over the years, the parties to the conflict have boxed themselves into a corner. The mutual suspicion between Israelis and Palestinians has reached the point whereby any concession either side may contemplate may be dubbed 'reward for terrorism' or 'surrender to repression'. This is one reason why direct negotiations between the two sides have been a sham. Not only have they not got anywhere until now, they are unlikely to do so in the future. In these circumstances, the parties may find it a lot easier, politically and psychologically, to make the necessary concessions

under intense pressure from outside powers, particularly the US in conjunction with other key players.

6. It has been said that the Obama administration will not be able to apply such pressure or even apply itself at all to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the near future, as there are more burning international and domestic matters to be dealt with. This can be a never-ending argument and it is possible that the case is made more in hope than conviction by those who would prefer not to see the matter settled along the lines of the prevailing international consensus. But, to the extent that there is a serious underlying point, it is based on the bogus idea that every issue is discrete, has to have an assigned priority number and be dealt with in detail by the president in person. From his record so far, limited though it may be, there is reason to suppose that President Obama subscribes to joined-up government and is quite able to keep his eye on the bigger policy picture while leaving the implementation of agreed strategies in different areas to high-level professionals.

7. In the final analysis, a peace strategy of any type will be constrained by the willingness of the conflicting parties to play their part. Any one of them could decide to dig in its heels and be prepared to forego any reward and absorb every penalty, even if this strongly contradicts the best interests of the people it ostensibly represents. This is a constant. The key to dealing with it is, first, to ensure that the chosen goals do accord with the vital interests of the local peoples, as well as furthering regional peace, and then to follow a strategy that is at once logically capable of achieving these goals, that is coherent and practical, that sets its inducements at a level that optimizes the chances of success and, finally, that is carried through with steely determination.

8 | The paramount imperative

"The only alternative to co-existence is co-destruction"
– Jawaharlal Nehru

Whether they like it or not, the Israeli and Palestinian people are fated to live alongside each other. Neither is going away. If the Palestinians fail to gain their place in the sun, the Israelis will never be left in peace to enjoy theirs. Conversely, the Palestinians will never win their freedom if the Israelis are convinced it will be at the expense of theirs. In this sense, each holds the key to the other's destiny.

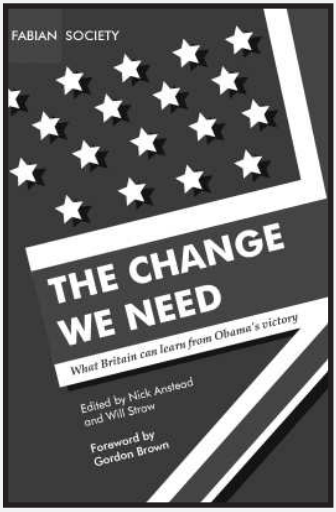
The indefinite continuation of this tragic conflict is not inevitable. The animosity between these two small, long-suffering peoples has little to do with their respective religious beliefs or cultural traditions, which have much in common. The fundamental reason for their bitter clash is that they have simultaneously aspired to the same piece of territory on which to exercise their self-determination and independence. This is the root of the conflict. Everything else has been artificially superimposed.

Yet, whatever the competing historical interpretations, the fact remains that for the past six decades one of these peoples has enjoyed its independence, even if under threat, and the other has been denied it.

For four of those decades, one of these peoples has been in occupation of the other, to the profound detriment of both societies, albeit in rather different ways. In this sense, the symmetry breaks down. If Israel continues to deny the Palestinians their statehood, it might come to pass that the rest of the world will start to withdraw its moral and political backing for Israel's own right to statehood. In this sense, the symmetry may sharply stand back up.

For the sake of both peoples, peace in the region and international stability, it is imperative that the critical missing parameter – the long-standing statelessness of the Palestinian people – is rectified with a minimum of further delay. The ultimate test of any strategy is both its potential to obtain this goal and its success in doing so. But time is of the essence. In the words of the old classic, it's now or never.

The Fabian Review, 2008



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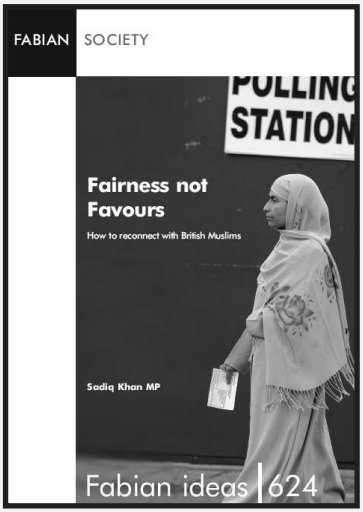

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Visions of the Endgame

A strategy to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict swiftly to an end

Tony Klug

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