



## *Israel Debates No. 6*

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### **How the Direct Peace Talks between Netanyahu and Abbas that began in September 2010 came to a Quick End**

On 7 December 2010, US Secretary of State Clinton had to acknowledge that the direct peace talks between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas that had started in the presence of US President Obama, Egypt's President Mubarak and King Abdullah II of Jordan only three months earlier had been suspended without a sign of success. On the eve of the direct talks Netanyahu had stunned both his counterpart and public opinion as he addressed Abbas in an unusually conciliatory tone with the words: "President Abbas, you are my partner in peace. And it is up to us, with the help of our friends, to conclude the agonizing conflict between our peoples and to afford them a new beginning." It quickly became apparent that this was nothing but pure rhetoric. Despite considerable political pressure on both sides, Barack Obama had failed to bring Israelis and Palestinians closer to essential concessions towards a peace deal. A sense of doom and gloom set in, since no one knows how to overcome the deadlock.

Ever since Netanyahu's right wing governing coalition came to power in April 2009, there has been virtually no progress in the peace process. Netanyahu responded to the Obama administration's continuous pressure with tactics of limited concessions aiming to maintain the status quo. If it hadn't been for the US pressing both sides, neither the commitment to the two-state solution in the Bar-Ilan speech of June 2009, nor the 10 month halt in settlement construction in the West Bank announced in November 2009 or the resumption of the – at first indirect (May 2010), then direct (September 2010) - peace talks with the Palestinians would have come about. Netanyahu never took concrete steps towards a two-state solution, since he would have had to expect his right wing coalition partners, especially Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, to walk out of the government. In addition to this, Netanyahu's course can count on broad support amongst the Israeli population and, as a result of the crisis within the Labor Party and the Israeli Left, meets with hardly any resistance worth mentioning.

At the same time, the Palestinians failed to take advantage of the settlement freeze – the first construction halt of this extent ever to have been announced by an Israeli government - and the possibilities it created. Instead, they stuck to their and the Americans' initial requirement that there would have to be a halt to all building in Israeli settlements including East Jerusalem and maintained that direct talks were subject to this condition. Furthermore, since Mahmud Abbas failed to overcome the rifts between the Hamas and Fatah movements, any type of agreement would have been valid for the West Bank but not for the Gaza Strip. Israel emphatically rejects such an arrangement.

When the settlement freeze ended in September 2010, Israel resumed construction in the West Bank. The Palestinians thereupon, while not declaring the talks as terminated - there had been only three meetings between Abbas and Netanyahu – did not return to the negotiation table either. Following the mid-term elections for the US congress in early November, the US made one last move to avoid a final breakdown in negotiations. In return for a continuation of the Jewish settlement freeze in the West Bank and – but this was not officially confirmed – an unofficial construction freeze in East Jerusalem, the US offered Israel generous security assurances, including 20

F-35 fighter jets. In addition to this, the US pledged to veto anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations. Netanyahu rejected these extensive US offers he couldn't get his cabinet to give the deal majority support.

Such was the situation when at the beginning of January, we asked Shaul Arieli and Israel Harel to share their views on the current state of affairs in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process. While both were writing their analyses, Al-Jazeera and The Guardian published the so-called "Palestine Papers" and in Egypt, a popular uprising against the Mubarak-regime kicked off. Both events are of major importance to the Middle East peace process and open up the prospect of permanent change to the inner and outer dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian process of negotiation.

In his analysis, **Shaul Arieli**, a former senior officer of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and one of the leading representatives of the Geneva Peace Initiative, holds that Benjamin Netanyahu and his government neglected to develop initiatives of their own to advance the peace process. Instead, he states, they pursued a policy of curbing and preventing Palestinian proposals. Arieli postulates that, as a result of the said policy, Israel is increasingly perceived as the side which refuses a peace solution and faces a rising delegitimization, whereas Mahmud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority are very active in different areas of policy and increasingly gain recognition and support from the international community. He also asserts that it is Netanyahu's objective to maintain a foreign policy status quo with American help and to assure his political survival at home by strengthening the Israeli presence in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. He claims Mahmud Abbas' strategy is to destabilize the Netanyahu government with help from the international community, including the UN, while meanwhile laying the foundations for a future Palestinian State that is to be proclaimed in August 2011. In his analysis, Shaul Arieli draws on developments in the region and warns that increasing influence coming from Iran might result in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict irreversibly turning from a national into a religious conflict, for which there would be no solution.

In his contribution, **Israel Harel**, former Chairman of the Yesha Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza and a leading voice of the settler movement in Israeli public discourse, presents an entirely different assessment. He argues that the Netanyahu government, as the governments preceding it, desires peace with the Palestinians and keeps taking according initiatives. Israel Harel believes that the vast majority of Israelis, including the Right, are well aware that Israel is left with no alternative to peace but to renounce rights to parts of its historic homeland, including parts of Jerusalem. In his view, it is the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian and Arab peoples that are not prepared to enter a compromise with Israel. He claims that the Palestinians are playing a game of pretence when they engage in negotiations in order to 1) give in to pressure from the Americans and the international community and win the support of global public opinion and 2) win time until their dreams have come true and Israel, that foreign body, no longer appears on the map of the Middle East. According to Harel, the Palestinians' ultimate objective is to create a Palestinian State on the entire historic Palestine territory. As regards the position of its Arab neighbours, he notes that contrary to official rhetoric, Arab regimes give little priority to the Palestinian case. On the contrary, to some, as is the case in Jordan, it has come to represent an internal policy problem of increasing magnitude. He claims Barack Obama to pursue a naïve and idealistic line of action in his Middle East strategy and expresses the hope that the US administration may return to the path of a realistic policy.

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Herzliya, 8 February 2011

## Who is Leading, the “Tango” between Netanyahu and Abbas? Comments on the status quo of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations

by Shaul Arieli

Since Binyamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister of Israel for the second time, the diplomatic process between Israel and the Palestinians has been characterized by trends which run counter to those which we had witnessed in the two previous decades:

1). Whereas the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, is taking initiative and action in a variety of channels, in domestic and international circles of reference, Netanyahu and his government are refraining from taking any diplomatic initiative whatsoever, and are remaining focused on attempts to prevent and to block the Palestinian moves.

2). Whereas Abbas is giving preponderant weight, in his considerations, to international and Arab entities, Netanyahu is principally gazing inward, at his own coalition, in an attempt to maneuver within the wedge created between Obama's administration and the House of Representatives, in order to alleviate the American pressure and to ensure that the United States will continue to stand by Israel against the Arab initiatives and the moves by Iran, and lately by Turkey as well.

3). Whereas the Palestinians are benefiting from growing international legitimation for their moves, all of which are taking place within the political arena, Israel is increasingly suffering from its image as a peace-refuser and is being increasingly delegitimized.

It will accordingly be appropriated to evaluate and analyze the overview of the present and developing situation, subject to these assumptions and evaluations – in other words, to describe and analyze the Palestinian initiatives and trends, to contrast them with the Israeli patterns of blocking and avoidance, and to evaluate each side's chances of succeeding in its mission. On one hand is Netanyahu, who seeks to preserve the diplomatic status quo through the United States, while at the same time ensuring his own survival in the political camp from which he arose by strengthening the Israeli foothold in East Jerusalem and the West Bank through extensive construction. On the other

is Abbas, who seeks to undermine Netanyahu's position by means of international pressure, which is likely to give him points in the domestic arena as well, while continuing to build the “state-to-be”.

The analysis and evaluation are based on two principal working assumptions. *Firstly*, it is estimated that no significant change in the composition of Israel's government is to be expected, meaning that there will be no significant change in its policy as well. In my opinion the split Labor Party took place this week for now removes the possibility of a change in government policy and its composition. It will actually reinforce Israel's present policy. This is because Netanyahu is afraid that he is likely to come to the elections with a government which is all farther right than his Likud Party, and accordingly, he must ensure that no votes trickle away from the Likud to the ultra-rightist parties, and especially not to Yisrael Beiteinu. I believe that Yisrael Beiteinu, headed by Avigdor Lieberman, and Shas, headed by Eli Yishai, will go to great lengths to find the magic formulas which are required to ensure that they remain in government, as this will serve the particular interests of each party. This means that the chances of seeing Kadima, headed by Tzipi Livni, join the present government or replace Yisrael Beiteinu, in order to enable a coalition basis for a different policy, are extremely slight. Since his election, Netanyahu has shown that, at the decisive moment, he prefers to remain in his natural home – the right, which is opposed to the solution of “two states for two peoples”.

*The second assumption* is the determination that the evaluation and analysis refer to existing trends, but that it is necessary to recognize the possibility that extraordinary events will give rise to a substantially different starting line from that which appears today to characterize the continuation of the process between Israel and the Palestinians. These processes may be the result of a collision between the mutually exclusive trends exhibited by the parties involved, or an attempt to convert it to additional players in the arena. The latter may include, for example, a military strike against Iran, an uncontrollable deterioration of the relations between Israel and Turkey, a descent into military operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, a return by Fatah to patterns of terror from the West Bank against Israelis on both sides of the “green line”, and more. Without any doubt the confidential records of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, documenting an expansive willingness for compromise on the Palestinian side, which have been published by Al-Jazeera in the

past days, will retroact on the negotiation process itself and on the positioning of the international community, e.g. in the UN. The ongoing developments in Egypt and the emerging changes in the regime of President Mubarak, who has been a reliable partner for Israel and the US, will also change the general regional framework for the peace process noticeably.

### **Overview of the situation**

I would like to begin with a description of the present situation, which is basically characterized by diplomatic stagnation. The unwillingness of the Palestinians to resume direct negotiations results from two constraints:

*Firstly*, the less important constraint is Israel's unwillingness to freeze the construction in the settlements – a precondition which, in view of its nature as basically American, does not enable Abbas to waive it and thereby to portray himself as less Palestinian than the Americans.

*Secondly*, the more significant constraint is Israel's unwillingness to agree on the Palestinian basic conditions:

- a) A framework of reference (ToR) for the negotiations, basically consisting of recognition of the 1967 territories as the territories of the Palestinian State, which was already granted by Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert in the negotiations toward a permanent arrangement in the course of the last decade.
- b) Eliminating the Israeli precondition for Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish State, which is perceived by the Palestinian leadership as an Israeli demand to remove the refugee question from the negotiating table and as justification for discrimination against Israel's Arab minority.
- c) Accepting the Palestinian demand for the permanent arrangement to lead to the end of the occupation and complete, albeit gradual, withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank.

The present pattern and intensiveness exhibited by the conduct of the United States lack the ability to bring Netanyahu to change his position, and it appears that, during the last visit by Dennis Ross and Mitchell to the area, the proposals made by the United States to the Palestinians showed a certain departure from its positions in recent years with regard to borders, security arrangements and the schedule for reaching an agreement. In this way, the United States is again becoming perceived by the Palestinians, and the Arabs in general, as an intermediary which is biased in Israel's favor. This week, Abbas conveyed grave disappointment with the American intermediation, and even expressed unprecedented criticism of what he defined as “an especially embarrassing situation, in which

American officials who, according to their own statements, do not recognize the legality of the Israeli settlements or of the annexation of Jerusalem by Israel, but, in practice, take no action whatsoever in order to prevent this activity.” This evaluation is leading to a series of parallel Palestinian moves which transcend the fixed triangle of Israel – the United States – Palestine, in the intention and the hope of reaching a significant breakthrough for one of them.

### **Palestinian initiatives and Israeli reactions**

Abbas and his Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, are acting intelligently on the basis of a broad strategic view, which is itself based on two complementary channels of operation – building the state-to-be and achieving international recognition thereof – and which lays at Israel's door a reality more difficult to handle than that of Arafat's day.

In the domestic sphere, they are taking measures, with American and international support, toward reestablishing the central power of the Palestinian Authority, by means of a number of efforts based on security reform and economic institutional reform: banning Hamas from the public domain in the West Bank, restraining the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, maintaining law and order, and economic development with emphasis on strengthening the middle class. Israel and the Palestinians are both benefiting from this success – Israel is benefiting from close security coordination, reduction of its forces posted in the West Bank, and a stable security situation which is managing to keep the conflict off the agenda of Israel's public. In exchange, it is enabling the redeployment of the Palestinian Police in Areas A and B (34 stations) and is removing checkpoints and barriers, and thereby strengthening the Palestinian Authority's control of the area as well as its economy. Due to the common interest of the struggle against Hamas, both parties are bound to the status quo and do not wish to undermine it; at the same time, the Palestinians are also benefiting from the ability to claim that they have met the conditions required for ending the first stage of the roadmap, and to demand the continuation and progression of the program which Israel has also recognized.

An additional Palestinian move in the domestic sphere is Abbas' attempt to bring about a reconciliation with Hamas, with a view to preventing “one address” which represents the Palestinian people. In the short term, this move does not appear to have a chance of implementation within the Egyptian document which has already been signed by Fatah. If it happens in the future, however, it is likely to undermine the basis for security coordination with Israel, which is already

severely criticized on the Palestinian home front; to terminate what remains of the blockade of Gaza; and to eliminate one of the Israeli arguments, with regard to the fact that Abbas does not represent all of the Palestinians today.

In the diplomatic sphere, Abbas' tactics include parallel operation in two directions: unilateral activity at the international level, and at the same time, maintaining the possibility of resuming the negotiations in their previous format, should a formula for compromise which enables this be achieved. To this end, he is choosing to adopt several courses of action at once, but, at the same time, to determine priorities among them, based on his estimation of the chances for each course of action to bring about a change in the status quo and to promote the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Firstly, under the assumptions that the "freeze" on construction in the settlements will not be renewed and that Netanyahu will not retreat from his conditions, Abbas will seek to pressure the Americans into making a proposal of their own for the ToR, which he will be able to "live with". Under this patronage, and as part of the diplomatic umbrella which has been provided to him by the Arab Peace Initiative Monitoring Committee, Abbas will be able to resume the direct negotiations without absorbing overly severe criticism on the home front and to stand up to Hamas in the struggle for Palestinian public opinion. Palestinian success in this move, which can also result from the isolation of the United States in its support of Israel, will force Netanyahu to reply to the proposal. As Netanyahu sees it, this is still not the worst possibility of all, as long as he chooses to consider the American proposal, rather than the Palestinian position, as the starting point for the negotiations. It appears, however, that the time being, Israel is successfully managing to prevent this move, through the efforts of the Jewish lobby at Netanyahu's Republican friends in the House of Representatives. This explains the "insulting proposal", as the Palestinians put it, which the special envoy Mitchell made to Abbas two weeks ago.

Secondly, cautious enlistment of the United Nations. The Palestinians are likely to initially seek to focus on the subject of the settlements, as opposition to their construction and expansion is considered a matter of international consensus. This measure is likely to be taken because of the position adopted by the Americans, which clearly opposes continued construction in the settlements – a fact which will make it almost impossible for the United States to veto such a draft resolution. Generally speaking, the Palestinians are seeking to obtain the censure in the form of a Security Council resolution, and not as

an announcement by the Secretariat of the Council, which would defuse the importance of the move. They are planning to propose a resolution in the very near future, as soon as possible after January 1, the date on which Bosnia-Herzegovina became the chair of the Security Council.

Israel is preparing for this possibility, and is making attempts to convince the permanent members of the Security Council; at the same time, it is investing most of its efforts in ensuring an American veto. Admittedly, to date, the United States has condemned the intention of approaching the Security Council as a unilateral move which runs counter to the original principle of discussing the permanent issues only at the negotiating table. It has even warned the Palestinian Authority that introducing the proposal is likely to have implications for the United States' relations with the Palestinian Authority. In actual fact, however, the United States is not really trying to prevent discussion of the proposal and has not adopted a clear stand on the question of how it will act if the proposal is brought for discussion.

According to the developments, the PLO will consider whether to also submit a proposal for a resolution to the Security Council with regard to recognition of the Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. If they encounter an American veto, but no other threats by the administration, the Palestinians may well gather the courage and the support to launch the move, under the "Unite for Peace" Resolution 377 (V), which basically specifies that, if the Security Council does not pass a resolution with regard to international peace and security, and does not succeed in counteracting aggression, due to a veto imposed by one of its members, it will be possible to convene the General Assembly within 24 hours and to discuss the matter and recommend effective collective measures in order to maintain or restore peace. If most of the states support this move and the state which vetoed the resolution is in the minority, the recommendation may be executed, including through the establishment of an international military force. Accordingly, the significance of Resolution 377 (V) is that the General Assembly will be able to adopt a resolution with regard to effective collective measures, and not merely to recommend them.

In such a case, Israel's ability will be extremely limited, because it may be assumed that the Palestinians will launch such a move only after having secured a promise by tens of states worldwide to recognize the Palestinian State. Israel, in such a case, will have a very small potential body of supporting states, and even that will be subject to

pressure, in light of the overall trend toward recognition of the Palestinian State.

Even if these moves do not have the desired outcome, I do not believe that, in the short term, the Palestinians will choose to withdraw from the existing agreements with Israel and go as far as dissolving the Palestinian Authority, as was recently emphasized by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in an interview to the London daily *al-Hayat*: “I do not consider the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority as an option. The Palestinian Authority is an enterprise of state-building – that is, obtaining independence – and it is the most important measures; accordingly, it is a national need, even more than a day-to-day need of the Palestinian people, and that is what was mentioned in the two-year plan which the Palestinian Authority began to implement in August 2009 under the title ‘Palestine: ending the occupation and establishing a State.’” At the same time, in the longer term, in the absence of an agreement and in the absence of international support, the PLO is likely to withdraw from the agreements with Israel under pressure by the Palestinian public, led by Hamas. In such a case, Israel will have to make preparations to resume the management of the Palestinian population in the format of the Civil Administration, or to ask a third-party entity to take on the responsibility for the Palestinian population. The chances of finding an entity which will be willing to grant such a request are estimated as extremely slight.

Assuming that direct negotiations will nonetheless be resumed, it appears that Netanyahu, in the present constellation of Israel’s government, will not dare to propose more than an interim agreement, with parameters which the Palestinians will not be able to accept, in light of the internal factors described above. This applies even more after the release of the Al-Jazeera Wikileaks. At the same time, should extraordinary events take place, they may be exploited for the purpose of achieving a long-term interim agreement, based on consensus with regard to borders and security and letters of guarantee for the Palestinians with regard to the future of Jerusalem and the refugees.

### **The surrounding area – reciprocal relations**

The expecting chain of events, as portrayed here, does not operate in a space occupied by Israel and the Palestinians alone. Rather, that space is replete with near and distant players, all of which affect the developments, and are affected by the shock waves, which extend beyond the borders of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – Egypt, where Mubarak’s regime is currently fighting for its political survival, Jordan and the Arab League, as well as Iran and Turkey.

Even without any further progress in the negotiations with the Palestinians, the security cooperation with Egypt remains of highest importance. In the light of possible changes in Egyptian policy, as e.g. the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in a future government of Egypt, Israel is very concerned and keeps track of the developments in the neighbour country with highest alertness. So far the Israeli as well as the Egyptian side have tried to countervail the Hamas in the Gaza Strip, with regards to their connection to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as well as to their role as “representative” of Iranian interests.

In the absence of a diplomatic process, Israel will continue to benefit from good security coordination with Egypt with regard to the border between Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula, because they share a common interest in retaining a mass, both in its relations with the “Muslim Brothers” in Egypt and as an “emissary” of the Iranian interests. Israel will also benefit from Jordanian security activity on the border between Jordan and the West Bank, which successfully prevents attempts at infiltration by volunteers from extremist Islamic organizations and smuggling of materiel – again, thanks to the common interest shared by Israel and Jordan. Moreover, Israel will receive tacit support for any move against Iran which threatens the pro-Western bloc of Arab states. On the other hand, Israel cannot expect the Arab and Muslim world to restore the presence of the eight representatives which it had in Israel during the days of the Oslo process. Quite the opposite is true: it could very quickly find itself without even the Egyptian ambassador – the last one left. I do not believe that the Arab world will hasten to pull the peace initiative proposed by the Arab League away from Israel. On the contrary: preserving the peace initiative will help the Arabs to represent Israel as refusing peace and rejecting the most generous proposal ever made by the Arab world. At the same time, eliminating the Iranian threat by means of a military move or through sanctions will attract the interest shared by the Arab leaders – Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan – and Israel in upholding the initiative.

An additional development which may take place, and which requires Israel to prepare for it in the short and medium term, refers to the rise of Iran and Turkey as regional powers with great influence over the Muslim and even the Arab world. Iran, which supports Hamas, is directing concerted efforts toward strengthening it against the PLO, not only in Gaza, but recently in the refugee camps in Lebanon as well. It supports the reinforcement of Hamas and Salafi jihadist organizations which operate in the camps, against the background of the weakened

PLO mechanisms within them. Over time, this activity is likely to erode what little remains of the PLO's legitimacy as the representative of the Palestinian people, and may even harm Abbas' chances of approving the agreement with Israel by referendum, should such an agreement be reached. In the medium term, Iran, with its military nuclear capacity, will benefit from the increasing influence of the Arab states, to the point of motivating them to recognize Hamas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, replacing the PLO.

A development of this type is likely to complete the transformation of the conflict from national to religious in nature, and to slam shut the diplomatic window of opportunity which would have enabled an arrangement with the Palestinians in particular and the Arab world in general.

In closing, I would like to recommend three preferable, parallel directions of action for the international community with regard to the conflict:

*Firstly*, to continue to invest efforts toward the resumption of direct and effective negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

*Secondly*, to be sufficiently alert to prevent deterioration in the relations between them, which could lead to an additional round of violence, whether small- or large-scale.

*Finally*, to continue to support the civil societies on both sides which are seeking to hasten the end of the conflict.

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## “FULL GAS IN NEUTRAL”

by Israel Harel

The purpose of the following article is to prove that only one side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli side, really has the ambition to progress toward peace – whereas the Palestinians, due to structural, religious, political and pan-Arab problems, are not a partner, and certainly not a real partner, to that ambition. And this is the reason, as borne out by the disclosures of the last month in Al Jazeera, why the talks are stuck.

This article – which is short because of the space allotted – will be divided into five brief sections:

- 1.) Where are the peace negotiations today and what are their purposes?
- 2.) The ambitions of the Palestinian Authority for international recognition and where this puts Israel.
- 3.) The US-Israel relationship on the subject of negotiations.
- 4.) The effect of these processes on Binyamin Netanyahu’s coalition structure.
- 5.) The regional impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **On the negotiations and the Palestinians’ real objectives**

When states enter into negotiations, they generally have a common goal of supreme importance. They aim to reach – sooner or later – agreements which both of the parties want and will be able to uphold. There have been negotiations, in the history of humankind, in which one of the parties was present and active, but not in order to reach an agreement; rather, the party in question, by the very act of its participation, sought to camouflage its covert goals, such as improving its status in international and domestic public opinion, or lulling the other party to the talks in order to attain secret objectives – among others, strategic fraud.

This, in my best judgment, applies to the Israeli-Palestinian case as well. Notwithstanding the many years which have gone by since the opening of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, negotiations cannot be concluded, because the secret goals of the Palestinian party are totally different from those which it presents to the Israelis, the Americans, the Quartet and world public opinion. Let us say that these goals have nothing to do with peace.

On the Israeli side, the governments – even the present Likud government – want peace. So do most of the citizens. Most of Israel’s citizens –

including those identified with what is called the “right wing” – have reached the conclusion that Israel must resolve by peaceful means what is known as the “Israeli - Palestinian conflict”. And because, in their opinion, the core of the conflict is territorial in nature, for the sake of the peace arrangement, Israel will have no choice but to give up parts of its historical land, including in Jerusalem. The extensive concessions made by Israel’s former Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, as recently exposed in documents which were published in the Guardian and Al Jazeera, prove this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In a speech in which he stated that the solution of the problem is “two states for two peoples”, Israel’s present Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, delivered a resounding slap in the face to his electors. The Likud, as everyone knows, has negated the possibility of a Palestinian state throughout the years, as such a state would extend over territories which were formerly ruled by the historic Jewish Kingdoms of Israel and Judea. The speech accordingly expressed a far-ranging ideological change in direction. The last significant force in Israeli politics which objected to “territorial concessions in exchange for peace” has joined what is referred to as the “peace camp”. There was a hue and cry; there were accusations of betrayal. But did Netanyahu take it back? Does Olmert deny that he made far-ranging concessions, including a concession with regard to Jerusalem (except for the Jewish Quarter) to Abu Mazen? Is Olmert taking it back now, following the publication in Al Jazeera? Is he sorry he made those concessions? Absolutely not.

Abu Mazen, on the other hand, utterly denies the disclosure in Al Jazeera! Why is he forced to deny it? After all, he attained a historic achievement: control of the overwhelming majority of the Old City of Jerusalem, East Jerusalem, an almost-complete Israeli withdrawal from the rest of the West Bank, including the uprooting of residents from most Jewish settlements, and the receipt of land areas from within the sovereign territory of Israel in exchange for the Jewish “settlement blocs” which would remain within the West Bank. Not even Arafat gained such achievements. So why are they setting fire to his photographs in Jenin, Nablus and Hebron? Why are Israel’s secret services forced to help preserve his life and protect his regime?

Instead of being proud of his achievements, instead of proving the greatness of his message to his people – primarily one of independence – he finds himself forced to deny that he attained all those achievements. Why?



Based on the responses by the leader of the Palestinian Authority to the achievements which he himself attained and his refusal to hold talks with the Netanyahu government, on the basis of those achievements, in order to reach a final agreement, only one principal conclusion can be drawn: the Arab people (the condemnation of Abu Mazen encompassed the majority of the Arab world, and not only the Palestinians) has not reached – and it is doubtful whether it even wants to reach – the yearning for peace which characterizes the Jewish people. Additional conclusions which may be drawn from the overwhelming disavowal of the agreements with Olmert: the talks were not conducted in order to reach an agreement, but rather, in order to respond to pressure exerted by the United States and other entities and for the sake of good international PR.

I do not know whether the title of this article is an original Israeli expression, or whether, like so many others, it was borrowed from foreign cultures. But with regard to the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians (and the continuum of years since the Oslo talks and the signing of the protocols which became agreements), the Israelis have been proposing one plan after another for a solution to the Palestinian problem, but the Palestinians, time and time again, have evaded decisions. And the “peace train”, at best, is staggering along in neutral – a “neutral” which has been accompanied, starting immediately after the adoption of the Oslo agreement, by a war of suicide bombers or missiles launched against civilian targets.

The Palestinian objective – and, from time to time, some of their spokespersons even say this openly – is to gain time until their real dreams come true. And in those dreams, Israel does not appear as a national-Zionist diplomatic entity which must be recognized and lived with; rather, it takes the form of a foreign element which must, in one way or another, be made to disappear – preferably, in view of Israel’s superior military strength, without an all-out military conflict. Terrorism, on the other hand, is preferable, because it exhausts the Israeli home front, as was proved in the early 2000s; it sows demoralization and internal dispute to the point of casting doubt on the variability of the Zionist entity to survive on a long-term basis in a hostile environment which wants no part of its presence in the area.

Technically, as set forth above, the Palestinians have been participating in the “peace process”. In practical fact, however, no Israeli proposal – and a wealth of such proposals have been made by the various governments which have negotiated with them – has been accepted. The same holds true of

proposals by extra-parliamentary groups from the Israeli left, such as the “Geneva initiative” (whose proponents, even now, after Abu Mazen’s repudiation of the agreements with Olmert, are still publishing advertisements titled “There is a partner”). The Arab side has rejected every proposal and has never offered a complete alternative proposal of its own, one that enables a map to be drawn and additional, non-territorial clauses to be added. The comprehensive, popular and profound Palestinian response to the “concessions” by Abu Mazen (who declared, on January 26 in Ramallah: “We shall die – but we shall not give up all of Jerusalem and the right of return”) unequivocally proves that there is not, and will not be in the near future, any possibility of reaching any agreement whatsoever.

Many men and women, a considerable proportion of whom are “people of good will”, have attempted to promote peace between the parties. Some of them had even devoted their entire career to doing so. National and international organizations and political parties have invested significant resources and efforts in the promotion of this long-awaited peace. American presidents have addressed their prestige and energy to promoting this worthy cause. Political camps in Israel have risen and fallen as a result of their (at times obsessive) involvement in achieving the ideal of peace. Having invested so much, and in vain, they refuse to take a proper look at the reality which is staring (so as not to say “slapping”) them in the face. And instead of changing course, they merely become ever more firmly entrenched in the mud, from which, as things now stand, there can be no way out.

Were they to be honest with themselves, they would have reached the unfortunately correct conclusion that the Palestinians’ entire objective is to gain time in order to reach their supreme strategic objective: a Palestinian state which contains all of Palestine, including the East Bank of the Jordan River; one which extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the Iraqi border. Stage 1: a state from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. Stage 2: the addition of what is now the Kingdom of Jordan to the Palestinian state.

A Palestinian intellectual, who was then a close colleague of Abu Mazen, asking about a decade ago where I thought the Palestinian state should be located. “In Jordan,” I answered. “Jordan, and not only the West Bank, was promised to the Jews in the Balfour Declaration. And the League of Nations, the precursor of the UN, adopted the Balfour Declaration and gave it the validity of international law. I’m willing to give up Jordan, even though it’s more than three times the land area of the State of

Israel and the West Bank put together. If you people really wanted a state and were willing to establish it in Jordan," I added, "you would have had a state a long time ago. After all, 70% of Jordan's citizens are Palestinians."

The man, who was surprised by my frank statement, agreed to take up the challenge. "It's true," he admitted at the end of a lengthy off-the-record conversation, "Jordan will eventually be part of Palestine too. And when the time comes, subject to political developments for which there are various scenarios," he added, "it will fall into our hands like a ripe fruit. Until then," he explained, "we must not take any active measures to promote this process. Certainly not before we have a state on the West Bank. We must not make the error of provoking Jordan, and additional Arab countries, against us. But in any event, the process is unavoidable."

### **The ambitions of the Authority for international recognition of the Palestinian State**

In a few months, a number of South American countries have recognized a "Palestinian State". This phenomenon is the result of Palestinian diplomatic efforts which undoubtedly place Israel in a position of diplomatic embarrassment. These regulations, however – just like the Palestinians' conduct in the talks with Israel – are vague. Not specific. Which "Palestinian State" will these countries recognize? What will its government be like? Where will its borders run? To these and other questions, even the Palestinians, who are divided among themselves – and especially now, following the disclosure by Al Jazeera – cannot, or do not want to, provide a response. Because the countries which recognized them, with the exception of Venezuela, do not want the Palestinian State to rise on the ruins of Israel, the Palestinians cannot disclose the truth in their heart – that is, that they do not accept the existence of Israel as the national home for the Jewish people; instead, they mutter something about the "1967 borders". Because there never were any such borders (they were agreements on armistice lines, which were explicitly defined as temporary and subject to negotiations on permanent borders), it is difficult to determine, at this stage, what practical weight such recognition can have and what its implications will be in the long term, aside from embarrassing Israel.

The countries who recognize Palestine are not serving peace; moreover, if we examine the subject in depth, they are not even promoting the rapid establishment of a Palestinian state a reason to Israel. Quite the opposite is true: recognition is delaying the establishment of such a state. This is because the Palestinians, encouraged by the support, are saying to themselves: "If one country

after another is recognizing us, we don't have to negotiate with Israel; we don't have to define for ourselves the borders for which we intend to strive, or the nature of the relationship between the Arab-Palestinian state and the Jewish-Israeli state; we don't even have to stop terrorism. It's a fact: they recognize us even though we're still firing Qassam missiles at the Jewish towns and cities in the Western Negev." In short, these recognitions are actually enabling the Palestinians to continue to evade – as they have always evaded – historic decisions. The most important of these decisions are the recognition of the State of Israel as a Jewish state and as the national home of the Jewish people, and the drafting of realistic borders which can be achieved while taking into account the historic, security-related and demographic needs of the State of Israel.

These recognitions are hastening the day on which the matter of recognition of the Palestinian State will be brought before the United Nations for a vote. Recognition by the UN will be automatic, and will not be contingent upon Palestinian recognition of the existence of a Jewish state, on the basis of the principle which was adopted at the time of the UN resolution on partition in November 1947, according to which the State of Israel is a Jewish state and the national home of the Jewish people; moreover, that recognition will be granted before any agreement has been reached with regard to the borders of the Palestinian State. Should this happen – and it almost certainly will – these will be delayed for many years, or will never be accomplished. This is because the resolution will encourage the Palestinians not to come back to the negotiating table. After all, they will have already received, without the negotiation in which they are refusing to return, what they want at this stage – UN recognition – without having to give anything in return, not even on the declaratory level. This will be an ideal situation for the fulfillment of their true, long-term strategic goals.

### **Israeli-US relations in light of the diplomatic stagnation**

Since the beginning of Barak Obama's term in office, Israel's relations with the United States have run aground. Obama, an idealist on his own behalf in worthy and unworthy areas, has decided to achieve a Pax Americana in the Holy Land. As a person who is not sufficiently conversant with the reasons which are stand in the way of things between the Jews and the Arabs, and who has gained the superficial impression that the key to the solution is held by Israel, he has focused his efforts on pressuring Israel and appeasing the Muslim world, with which his own country has been in a state of tension, especially since the events of 9/11.

In the days and his predecessor, George Bush, negotiations took place between the Israelis and the Palestinians – negotiations which have now been extensively reported by Al Jazeera. Although construction (admittedly, not State-supported construction) was taking place in the settlements while the negotiations were going on, this did not prevent Abu Mazen and his team from meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel, or with the Foreign Minister and the professional teams from Israel's Government ministries. Obama arrived, his pressure on Israel began, and the same Palestinians who had come to Jerusalem only a few days before not only stopped coming there in Obama's time; they became unwilling to renew the talks unless Israel froze all construction and the settlements. Israel, under the vast pressure exerted by Obama and his administration, gave in. It stopped the construction, including clinics and kindergartens, for 10 months; it destroyed everything that was nonetheless built during the freeze; and, in so doing, it created severe internal political problems for itself. This, after all, was the Likud government, which had gone to the elections with a promise that – by contrast to the Olmert government – there would be State-supported construction in those places. All this, however, did not impress the Palestinians; not even the construction freeze brought them back to the talks. In this day.

I'm not blaming President Obama for driving the Palestinians up to such a high position, in hope that American pressure would subdue Israel and bring it to its knees. The ones who should be severely criticized are those who do believe that the Palestinians seek peace and that the American administration has a central role in bringing peace to the Middle East. They are the ones who must be made to see that Obama, through his lack of understanding and his idealistic – but not realistic – viewpoint, has ratcheted back everything that had already been achieved (and, in my opinion – as witness Abdul Mazen's recent denials – nothing was achieved at all) and has driven the Palestinians to a high position from which it would be difficult for them to climb back down, even if they wanted to do so. And they don't.

Barak Obama has not learned a thing. The baseless doctrine, which holds that an arrangement for the Israeli-Palestinian problem is the precondition for solving America's problems with the Arab and Muslim world, still dominates his foreign policy. And there is something worrisome about the fact that his conduct has not changed. If, at the beginning of his term in office, he acted this way on the basis of mistaken strategic considerations (the Cairo

speech, for example, which harmed Israel but did not give rise to any Islamic-Arab *rapprochement* with the United States), he should not, two years later, be continuing along the same line, continuing to refuse to visit Israel, while, at the same time, flying to Jakarta and reinforcing there, to a great degree, the doctrine which he founded in Cairo. In view of the fact that the Jakarta speech was made notwithstanding America's disappointment with the outcome of the Cairo speech, it may be said that he has learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

The rhetorical silence which has prevailed between Israel and the United States since the resumption of construction (again, as in Olmert's time, not State-supported construction!) in Judea and Samaria, does not necessarily mean that Obama admits his errors. Nor does the fact that Israel was not mentioned in his address to the nation of January 25. It may definitely be, as has been hinted from time to time by Benjamin Netanyahu (as well as by Ehud Barak and his ugly divorce from Israel's Labor Party), that something secret is now being cooked up between the Administration and the Government of Israel, and that accordingly, the construction of a few hundred residential apartments, which is now going on in the territories, cannot stop the "big move".

Even if nothing secret and dramatic in the context of a diplomatic arrangement is going on behind the scenes, there may be additional reasons for the cease-fire between Obama's administration and Netanyahu's government – reasons which have to do with the common interests of the two countries. Iran, for example. There can be no doubt that Israel upgraded its position vis-à-vis the America when it succeeded, according to various international publications, in non-violently sabotaging the development of the Iranian centrifuges which were intended to produce a nuclear bomb – and apparently in carrying out additional secret operations. Then again, perhaps the silence is related to Obama's problems with his domestic policy. Israel, as everyone knows, has quite a few friends on Capitol Hill.

The dramatic events which are now taking place in the Arab and Islamic world will apparently help to convince the Americans to re-evaluate Israel's relationship with the United States. Quite a few Americans have pointed out, in the last few days, that notwithstanding the political and ethical crisis going on in Israel (precisely when a huge shockwave is shaking the Middle East and North Africa), it has once again shown itself to be the stronghold of democracy in that depressing area. And it has done so at a time when everything which the Obama Administration attempted to achieve in

that area – if it managed to achieve anything at all – is going (so as not to say “gone”) with the wind.

Notwithstanding the monumental errors which Obama made in our area – including the abandonment of Mubarak – we may hope that he and his people are now coming to their senses, that they now understand the outcome of the strategic errors which they made, and that their relations with Israel – the lone island of political stability in the area – will get back on course. If they don't, and if they continue to treat Netanyahu the way they did until recently – and the way they're treating Mubarak now – they will only continue to encourage the intensification of instability. Peace with the Palestinians, in any event, is not something they can achieve that way.

As far as Israel is concerned – and let us recall that Israeli decision-makers are not much better than the “little lost lambs” in the United States – the abandonment of Mubarak is the best possible proof of Obama's absolute lack of understanding of what may, and what must not, be done in the Middle East.

Obama, in making a conciliatory gesture to Bashar Assad – the greatest warmonger in the area and foremost among the providers of shelter to terrorism, which harms both Americans and Israelis – and returning the American ambassador to Syria, while at the same time strengthening other dictatorships in the Middle East and in close proximity to Iran, is harming Egypt, which, notwithstanding everything that is happening now, has the regime which is closest to democracy in the Islamic world. True democracy, after all, will not prevail in Egypt, even if the “forces of freedom and democracy” defeat the forces of darkness which are currently in power - the next regime won't be a democratic one either, even if the next rulers won't be the Islamic Brotherhood. In Lebanon as well, the true ruler – Hezbollah – does not hold the formal positions of power.

The monumental errors of the United States are causing vast damage to its reputation and that of the entire West. Among other things, they are pushing precisely the countries which are dear to them into the arms of the countries which are perceived as the future Great Powers, in view of the imminent decline of the United States: Russia (which is attempting to make a comeback), China, and even Iran.

While other countries in the area can look forward to some kind of alternative, Israel really can't. It will

have to adjust – even if Obama's administration learns from its mistakes and starts trying to bring Israel closer again – to a world in which America's status (and, as a result, Israel's own status) is being eroded.

Most unfortunately, since the United States began to decline in strength, Israel has not been preparing the ground for closer relations with the rising powers. It is doubtful whether the present government is capable of making this switch, which is not only political, but mental as well. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense, as well as other Cabinet ministers and Members of Knesset – and, in this, there is no difference between coalition and opposition – are inextricably linked to the American culture and the capitalist lifestyle which it embodies. They have close personal ties with the highest political, military, intelligence, media, academic and economic echelons in the United States, and it is doubtful whether they can act according to the changing circumstances and enlist the support of a power which will constitute an alternative to the support which was provided by the United States when the relations between the two countries were better.

#### **The effect of the processes with the Palestinians on Netanyahu's coalition**

After many years in which the Israeli-Palestinian question had top priority – certainly at the level of political preoccupation – in Israel, most Israeli citizens, Cabinet ministers and Members of Knesset now want the country to prefer, and the Government to concentrate on, a civil agenda: Education, the economy, culture, health, housing for young couples. personal and social security are beginning to be more important to Israelis. It's not that they belittle the importance of an arrangement with the Palestinians; most Israelis simply don't believe that such an arrangement will be achieved in the near future. And they are no longer willing domestic problems to be pushed aside in favor of concentrating on fruitless discussions with the Palestinians.

But it is difficult to believe that they will succeed in changing anything – because the Israeli media, which set the national agenda, is continuing to rank the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue at the top of Israel's priority list. This being the case, even political parties on whose agendas the subject does not hold the #1 slot – the ultra-Orthodox parties, for example – are forced to define their position on the problem. This is why the basis for the sustainability of Israel's government, unlike that of most countries, is neither economic or social, but political, diplomatic and ideological, and is derived from the

positions of the various parties with regard to the arrangement with the Palestinians.

The Labor Party, which, due to pressure from extreme left (which, in light of the “left turn” taken by the Likud, have become an ever-shrinking camp which competes actively for each vote), was not happy about remaining in Netanyahu’s coalition. Moreover, the media – the overwhelming majority of which is identified with leftist positions – was giving it a hard time over its partnership with Netanyahu. Notwithstanding his “two states for two peoples” speech, the Israeli Prime Minister is still not trusted by the radical left, which claims that he doesn’t really want peace with the Palestinians. This has given rise to a situation which does not exist in any proper democratic Western government, whereby sitting Cabinet ministers have spoken out in public in opposition to their own government. And the Prime Minister, fearful of dissolving the coalition, could not dismiss those ministers, as the law allows him to do.

Now, after the shakeup by Ehud Barak, Netanyahu’s coalition is freer to act as the Prime Minister wants it to. The religious and ultra-Orthodox parties, if there are no further diplomatic upheavals such as the recognition of “two states for two peoples”, are not expected to pose significant problems for Netanyahu. The only problems which he can expect concerning the behavior of Yisrael Beitenu, the right-wing party headed by Avigdor Lieberman. He, after all, is unpredictable leader, who heads a party which is 100% behind him. And that party, in principle, is a rightist party.

### **The regional implications of the diplomatic stagnation**

As in the case of an earthquake, there is no way that a situation which takes place anywhere in the global village cannot avoid leaving records on the seismograph of the world. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, there is an often fantastically exaggerated concept of the degree to which this conflict is capable of affecting the area.

My principal argument is that, by contrast to generally accepted opinion among most Israeli commentators – including some of Israel’s intelligence entities – the principal reasons for the preoccupation of the Arab states, especially those which surround Israel, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have nothing to do with the ostensible injustice which Israel has caused to the Palestinians. In the recent demonstrations in Cairo, Alexandria and Beirut – and certainly in Tunisia – I have noticed very few posters on behalf of Palestine. At the same time, I have noticed thousands of posters calling for freedom and

democracy. The era during which absolutist regimes could channel any failure, any corruption, toward Israel and blame the Zionists for the poverty and backwardness in their own countries, seems to be coming to an end. Admittedly, criticism of Israel will continue to be heard throughout the Arab world; here and there, some regimes will still attempt to clutch at that criticism. But the world is becoming more and more aware that the Palestinian problem is not a central one in the lives of the Arab peoples. They have found out that it is not that problem which is making them live in poverty, oppression and hopelessness. Nor is it superfluous to point out that, had the Arab states, especially those adjacent to Israel, wanted the Palestinians to have a state, Egypt and Jordan could have granted them such a state before 1967.

Iran, as we may recall, declared its commitment to the destruction of the “Zionist entity”. The preparations which it is making are preoccupying the entire world. Are the Palestinians the reason for this? According to generally accepted thinking – they are. In truth, however – they are not.

Until Khomeini’s revolution, Iran was a close ally of Israel. The Shiite ayatollahs came to power in Iran, not because of that alliance, but because they carried a religious revolution, a Shiite revolution. Their principal purpose, in addition to strengthening their status within Iran, is to constitute a spiritual and logistical leadership for the Shiite revolution which must begin in the Middle East and continue throughout the entire world.

Israel must disappear from this world, because it proclaims the holy ground of Islam. This is the first and foremost reason for which the ayatollahs’ regime is concentrating such vast efforts on striving to destroy Israel. It is exploiting the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel in order to impart the appearance of a bit of rational ideology to the primitive religious desire for destruction.

Only Jordan – 70% of whose residents, as set forth above, are of Palestinian extraction – may be said with relative certainty to have been directly affected by the peace process (or more correctly, the absence of a peace process). This is an active majority, with a well-developed national awareness, which devotes considerable attention to monitoring what is happening with their brothers on the West Bank – and with their Palestinian brothers in Israel as well. Admittedly, the latter are Israeli citizens; nonetheless, most of them consider the Jewish State to be an illegitimate entity.

King Abdallah, who is primarily interested in keeping his crown intact, maneuvers – rather successfully so

far – between the dependence of his kingdom's security on Israel and the need to preserve the tenuous connections between the Palestinian majority and the bed when minority. For some time, Israeli intelligence, according to non-Israeli sources, has been questioning his ability to continue these maneuvers in the long term, and has been suggesting – more insistently in the wake of the mass demonstrations in several Arab countries – that Israel should prepare for a situation in which the monarchy, faced with the pressures of the Palestinian population, will be forced to become constitutional or overthrown entirely.

The king understands this better than anyone else. Outwardly – and in order to appease the Palestinian population – he blames Israel for the stagnation and demands that it withdraw from the West Bank in favor of a Palestinian State. In reality, however, he does not favor such a state – primarily because his own kingdom has secret dreams of again becoming the most influential entity in its own backyard. The Jordanian ruler knows that, if a Palestinian state is established, it will endeavor to engulf Jordan – not only because there are more Palestinians in Jordan than in the West Bank, but also because the primary factor which is keeping the two populations apart is the Hashemite crown. And the irredentism, once the process begins, will be at such a high level as to be unstoppable.

Jordan, then, does not really want a Palestinian state.

Syria is known to be dominated by a sect which is principally founded on the Alawite tribe. By contrast to the tribal governments of most Arab countries – which are majority tribes – the Alawite tribe is a minority. Accordingly, it requires a great deal of tyranny in order to remain in power. We all recall the slaughter which Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, perpetrated in Homs, murdering some 20,000 Sunnites who had dared to challenge his rule.

The "Syrian" identity – an artificial identity, which resulted from the artificial division of the area, pursuant to the Sykes-Picot agreements after World War I – was formulated by its rulers, on the basis of xenophobia, and especially the virulent hatred of Israel and the Jews

It is hard to know to what extent the Palestinians concern the average Sunnite in Damascus. It may well be that the situation there is no different from that in Cairo and other Arab capitals, which are now being shaken by a political earthquake.

As for Lebanon, the last state adjacent to Israel which will be mentioned in this section, the majority

of its residents are exposed to the Palestinian problem which has been troubling them for 63 years. They would very much like, for example, to be rid of the Palestinian refugees who have been dwelling in huge camps on Lebanese soil for more than 60 years, inflaming the atmosphere which is already hot enough, and cooperating, notwithstanding the fact that most of them are Sunnites, with Hezbollah.

Hezbollah, the dominant force in the Land of Cedars, has adopted the Palestinian problem as a cause, and accuses the heads of the Palestinian Authority of spinelessness, and even of treason, for their willingness to promote the peace process with Israel and give up the "right of return". As Iranian agents for all intents and purposes, the heads of Hezbollah will attempt to torpedo any positive process which takes place – assuming that any such process takes place – to the south.

To conclude this section:

It would be exaggerated to assume that the Palestinian subject no longer preoccupies the Arab regimes in the Middle East, or that they do not care whether the Palestinians do or do not obtain a state. At the same time, the Palestinians are not the most important issue in the world for the average Arab citizens, whose economic troubles and health issues – in addition to their aims for freedom and democracy in their own countries – concern them above all.

This is the lesson which must also be learned from those foreign entities who believe, like some American generals, that even the war in Afghanistan is related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Obama administration, in any event, must shake off this conception which has persisted for many years. When it wakes up and adopts a rational policy, it will contribute to increasing the stability and calm throughout the area, and perhaps, in the longer term, also to changing the Arab hopes for Israel's disappearance.

Then, and only then, can the true peace process begin.

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