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GETTING OUT OF THE PRESENT ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLAGRATION

By Dr.Yair Hirschfeld, Director General, Economic Cooperation Foundation

The present hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians have a major impact on other areas of the Middle East, and are accordingly of great concern not only to the parties immediately involved, but also to regional powers and the International Community at large. Here, as elsewhere, a wide coalition of the pragmatists, and a commonly prepared action plan is
necessary, to make it possible to move from fighting to cease-fire, and from cease-fire to a sustained conflict management and resolution process. Here again, policy guidelines defined by the International Community, particularly the Quartet Roadmap, and the three conditions defined by the Quartet for acceptance are important way signs indicating landmarks on the way ahead.

In attempting to describe a possible way out of the present situation, this short paper, relates to three issues: first, where Israel and the PA left off; second, the need for a public diplomacy effort; third, the need for a practical stability building program.

1. Where we left off

Shortly before the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers by the Hisbollah and their attack on Israel sovereign territory, the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue had reached the beginning of a way out of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis situation. An understanding was being suggested and brokered by Egypt. The Palestinian side would oblige itself to release Gilad Shalit, alive and healthy; Qassam rocket attacks would stop completely, and a cease-fire would be announced and maintained. In a now publicly known meeting between Abu Mazen, and Yuval Diskin, head of Israel's security services, as published by Palestinian newspapers, the Israeli side offered not only to maintain the cease-fire, but to release in return for the cease-fire Palestinian prisoners held by Israel to President Abu Mazen. Thus new rules of the game should be created that would offer a reward for a Palestinian policy of stability building. Whereas, UN Security Council Resolution 1559 should guide a policy action plan in Lebanon, UN Security Council Resolution 1515, referring to the Roadmap, would guide a policy action plan for Israel and the PA. This approach should provide the opportunity to develop with all concerned parties - the Government of Israel, the PA, and the Quartet powers - a common public diplomacy initiative, which is being described in its basic contours, immediately below.

2. The Case for Public Diplomacy

The intention of the Government of Israel to carry out a substantial withdrawal from West Bank territories fully in line with Roadmap obligations, aiming to bring about negotiations, end of occupation, and a permanent Israeli-Palestinian peace that will deal with all outstanding issues, has created the opportunity for a combined international and regional public diplomacy effort, which will create a political, a security and an economic horizon for the Palestinian people. The political horizon should describe steps that are necessary, by peaceful unilateral action, by coordination and by negotiations to reach an end of occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state with al-Quds as its capital, and a fair and comprehensive solution of the Palestinian refugee problem. The security
horizon should describe how the Palestinian people, with assistance of the International Community, can create security, law and order for the Palestinian people based on non-violence, the full implementation of Roadmap obligations and security coordination with Israel. The economic horizon should describe how the Palestinian people, with assistance of the International Community can develop economic independence and sovereignty that would lead to economic growth and prosperity.

In order to define clear steps in reaching those aims, an international initiated public diplomacy effort, would have to describe in some detail a proposed action plan in four stages: In the first stage, the rules of engagement between the PA-Presidency, the PA-Government on one hand, the Government of Israel and the International Community on the other hand, will have to be defined. In the second stage, a stability package will have to be developed. In the third stage, a coordinated action plan will have to outline how Israel can withdraw under secure circumstances from up to 90 % of territories in the West Bank, and how a functioning infrastructure for a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian state can be created. In the fourth stage this plan will detail conditions for Israel and the PA to return to direct negotiations regarding the achievement of a Permanent Status Agreement, the establishment of a Palestinian state and the solution of all outstanding issues between both parties.

3. The Need for a Stability Building Program

The present weakness of the Palestinian government system, the lack of law and order, and power of various war lords necessitates the development of an incremental stability building program. Largely based on experience gained by EU-BAM (EU Border Assistance Management) in Rafah, the International Community can assist President Abu

Mazen to develop an effective border management structure, based on the Presidential Guards, that can develop gradually into a Palestinian nation-wide gendarmerie, and help in carrying out necessary security reforms in a gradual approach, permitting for social, economic and political inclusion of various sectors of Palestinian society. Evidently such a stability building program will have to refer to relevant strategic, technical and operational requirements.

Dr. Yair Hirschfeld, Director General , Economic Cooperation Foundation