

**ANOTHER VIEWPOINT**  
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Dear reader,

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT (AVP) is my way to express my commitment to positive thinking, constructive thinking and creative ideas as an aid in the resolution of conflict in the Middle East with a special focus on the welfare and goals of the people of the Middle East.

To be non-partisan is not easy. One is quickly placed in a pigeon hole on the basis of the publication in which an article appears, assuming it is allowed to appear in the first place. To be partisan is certainly understandable, but it does limit one's perspective. While partisanship promotes the party's platform, it also attacks those of other parties, even though their platforms may be equally constructive and positive. Much is lost in such an encounter. In AVP, I will concentrate on the positive regardless of party.

Finally, much of the analysis of Middle East issues is conducted through the eyes of the superpowers of their allies within the region. However, there are issues that need to be treated primarily from the standpoint of the people of the Middle East. For example, it may be more significant to achieve peace in the region, rather than to realize a victory for one superpower or the other. AVP will have this focus.

I hope that AVP will stimulate discussion and draw attention to this and other viewpoints that may help in resolving conflict in the Middle East and elsewhere.

## **INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST:**

### **A ROAD TO TAKE OR NOT TO TAKE**

Many countries, including the Arab countries, are calling for an international peace conference. The Palestinians, as represented by the PLO, on one hand, and Israel, as represented by a divided government, on the other, also seem to want the same thing, though only half-heartedly. But why should any of the directly concerned parties want it? Or, who stands to win and who stands to lose in this forum?

An international peace conference in which the permanent members of the Security Council and the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict participate, can only have a minor impact towards a solution of the conflict. The only way in which it can lead to a solution is if it promotes mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinians, and if it results in direct negotiations between the warring parties. The Palestinians may benefit if, as a result, the PLO will begin to count as one of the “state governments” in the region; if the PLO will be recognized by “all” members of the Security Council as an equal party; if participation occurs without the precondition of unilateral recognition of Israel by the PLO; if such participation will help to cement a little more solidly the backing of the PLO by the Soviet Union; and if participation will calm down any internal criticism of the PLO by different Palestinian factions who oppose contact with Israel.

Against these potential benefits, the PLO is bound to suffer some costs. An international conference may serve mainly to diffuse the responsibilities and reduce the Palestinians to being one of many parties, even though they are a principal party, especially so if

the PLO representatives were to participate as members of a Jordanian delegation; the international conference may increase. Palestinian dependence on the permanent members of the Security Council, even though the permanent members can only veto resolutions, but cannot impose or enforce them; the conference may subject the Palestinians to high pressure to make premature compromises toward Israel and thus offset any potential advantages they may hope for to regain some balance in their favor; the conference may strengthen Jordan's position as the principal party, which can only be at the expense of the Palestinians; it also may tie even more tightly the fate of the Palestinians to the global conflict whose solution can hardly be considered on the horizon; finally, the international conference may simply drive the Palestinians into a trap of an intra-Israeli political struggle from which they can hardly benefit, but which can easily push the prospects of a solution farther into the future.

In contrast, Israel may benefit from such a conference, despite the apparent reluctance to endorse it by the Government of Israel. Indeed, it is possible that the clamor for or against an international conference, respectively by Shimon Perez or Izhak Shamir, is a tactic to avoid solutions that may require Israel to make a genuine compromise. If Mr. Perez wanted a conference, he would not stipulate the impossible as preconditions. Mr. Perez stipulates that, "the USSR must allow its Jewish population to emigrate and must re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel; a representative Palestinian organization having no links with the PLO must suddenly come into being, accept UN Security Council Resolution 242 (which completely disregards any notion of Palestinian identity), and join the Jordanian delegation; the People's Republic of China must establish diplomatic relations with Israel; the US must consent to take part in an international conference as an equal of the USSR; all the powers must consent to take

part and to meet stiff Israeli requirements, and all those attending the conference must agree on rules of procedure for an international conference.” If Mr. Shamir does not want a conference, he should not leave the door open and make participation seem possible by setting condition, even though his conditions are impossible to meet. Mr Shamir’s conditions, in addition to those of Mr. Perez, stipulate that there will be no Palestinian State, no PLO participation, and no removal of settlements from the Occupied Territories; he leaves nothing to be negotiated at the conference. Given these conditions, the conference is unlikely to materialize. Israel, nevertheless, will be able to blame others for the failure, continue the occupation of Palestinian territory, and exploit the opportunity to establish more settlements. In the meantime the Arab countries which argue for a conference seem to have no agreed-upon target. And while they continue to try to heal their internal conflicts, they help in wasting time and distracting attention from the Palestinian Israeli conflict by calling for a conference that has little use for any of them, with the exception of Jordan. Jordan is bound to be a potential winner at the conference if it succeeds in carrying the responsibility of a principal party, at the expense of the Palestinian; it is a winner if it manages to institutionalize agreements of coexistence with Israel, which seem to be already in force; and it is a winner if by such action it heals its rift with the United States since the sale of arms to Iran became known.

Yet, the international conference idea should not be dismissed as useless. The two superpowers have agreed to participate, in different degrees of commitment. The USSR is willing to participate, probably to reaffirm its involvement in the Middle East, to cement its relations with its allies in the region, and to revive its relations with Israel, to which it was one of the first countries in the world to give formal recognition.

The U.S., though not fully committed to a conference as yet, may be willing to participate if the conference will serve the cause of Israel, if it exposes the USSR involvement in the region, and if it strengthens the position of Jordan as a principal party. Nevertheless, the more participation of the superpowers, and other members of the Security Council, would bring the conflict back to the table and rekindle the peace efforts which seem to have been dormant for a long time.

As far as a resolution of the Palestinian Israel conflict is concerned, a better road to take is to conduct direct negotiations between the principal parties, Israel and the PLO. These are the two parties most directly affected, and their country, Palestine, is the territory which is in dispute. It should be evident by now that a peaceful settlement of the conflict is contingent upon recognition by both parties of their mutual rights to self-determination and national sovereignty, and to secure coexistence within internationally recognized boundaries. It has become evident also that international conferences and intermediary parties have had little success in bringing about positive results. By contrast, direct negotiations have led to peaceful agreements within the region and outside it.

However, if the direct negotiations road does not seem feasible, and if the international conference road is to be taken, it should be emphasized that the conference will be helpful to the extent to which it identifies the Palestinians and the Israelis as the principal parties to the conflict, and to the extent to which it makes direct negotiations between them more probable.

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The next AVP issue: Israel's Search for Peace: It is Time for Redirection

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