

**ANOTHER VIEWPOINT**  
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**PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT**

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The United States Peace Initiative and its Middle East International Peace Conference seem to have had a stillbirth. More correctly, they were never born because they were never meant to be. The would-be parents had apparently decided that it would be dangerous for them to change their status and impregnate themselves with an offspring they did not care for.

The latest idea of an international peace conference acquired a certain momentum about a year ago, reaching a climax when the U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz decided to take personal charge of the peace initiative and start shuttling back and forth between the capitals of a few Middle East countries. Secretary Shultz's declarations that the peace initiative is alive notwithstanding, that initiative and the proposed international peace conference show no sign of life. They are dead and that should not be surprising. Few serious observers expected the United States to succeed. The initiative was doomed to failure from the start because it offered little inducement to the relevant parties to compromise, whether in rewards or in reduction of costs. Neither Israel nor the Palestine Liberation Organization nor Syria could find much in the initiative to justify a compromise of their long-held positions on the major issues.

Israel, at least as represented by the Shamir government, had no use for the international conference, nor for a peace settlement it did not dictate because it has what it wants: it has the land and the full uncompromised support of the United States. Furthermore, the absence of

peace is not new for Israel and its leaders all of whom have grown up with war and conflict as part of the daily menu. A state of peace would probably be a frightening experience for them. At the same time, Israel's losses in the conflict have not been unbearable to them: the human losses have been minimal compared with losses of the other parties; the material losses have been offset by levies on the occupied territories and by aid from the outside, and when not offset, they are rationalized as the price for security. In the meantime, Israel holds on to the Occupied Territories and acts as a superpower in the region.

The Palestinians, as represented by the PLO, also had little stock in the U.S. peace initiative, especially because they were not a party in it. The Secretary of State made conflicting declarations. On one hand, he respects the legitimate rights of the Palestinians; on the other, he denies them the right to choose their own representatives. The Secretary would meet individual Palestinians but would not recognize or meet with the leadership. Yet, it is the leadership that can negotiate and has the authority to make decisions. The Secretary of State went farther echoing the most extreme slogan of the government of Israel: he committed himself and the government of the United States to the Three Nos: No Negotiation with the PLO, No State of Palestine, and No Return to the 1967 borders. In view of such a public commitment by the Secretary of State, it is hardly surprising that the PLO and the Palestinians at large would have little inducement to compromise and give support to the U.S. peace initiative.

Syria would be a party at the international peace conference. Once the conference is convened, Syria would be expected to go into direct negotiations with Israel. But why would Syria want to negotiate with Israel which has broken international law by annexing some of its territory and persists in considering the annexation permanent? Syria has seen no gesture of

good will or good intentions on the part of Israel to justify its support of the peace initiative. Syria has not seen any pressure put on Israel by the United States to show good will or good intentions toward a peaceful settlement with Syria. Any compromise in such circumstances is bound to be wasted. In fact, it would be surprising if Israel were anxious to enter into negotiations with Syria at this time: Israel has the Golan Heights, UN observers to help maintain a ceasefire in the area, and has little security risk. Hence a compromise by Israel would seem largely premature and unnecessary. It is true that much more than we know probably was covered in the meetings between Secretary Shultz and the leaders of Israel and Syria, but the signs are not encouraging that the peace initiative and the conference would be rewarding for either party.

If any country were to benefit from the U.S. peace initiative and the international conference, it would be Jordan and by implication Israel. Jordan, according to the initiative, would be a main party to the negotiations; Jordan would take the lead on behalf of the Palestinians, and undermine their present leadership, the PLO; Jordan might retrieve some territory it had occupied between 1948 and 1967; it might formalize any tacit agreements it has with Israel; and it might solidify its friendship with the United States. Indeed, Jordan had good reasons to support the peace initiative, but even Jordan could not swallow the renewed public commitment of Secretary Shultz to Israel by reaffirming the Three Nos stand on behalf of the United States. Jordan had to withhold its open support of the initiative.

The flurry of activity on behalf of the peace initiative and the international peace conference has now been overshadowed by the Palestinian Uprising in the Occupied Territories. Indeed, the peace initiative seems all be formally declared dead and buried. The

conflict has now acquired new features: direct action by the Palestinians and harsh reactions by Israel; mounting losses on both sides, though the losses are not symmetric or comparable. Israel's losses have been largely in material terms. The cost of reacting to the Uprising has reached over 100 million dollars a month over and above the regular budget of occupation. In addition, Israel has had to lengthen the reserve army service from 40 to 62 days a year, which is over a 50% increase in wasted human capital on account of the reserve army; and it has suffered some human casualties. In contrast, almost 200 Palestinians have been killed, several hundred more have been injured, and thousands have been arrested or jailed; and hundred of millions of dollars have been lost in unearned income and destroyed capital. However, the most severe cost both parties have been endured is the pain suffered by the families of the casualties, and the deep feelings of enmity generated within each party against the other. There is hardly a family that has not been directly or indirectly affected by the human losses of the war. In the meantime, the Palestinians have learned a lesson from Israel: that violence and terrorism pay; that might can be right if given enough time; and that one should not compromise until one has to.

Yet, all need not be lost. The cry for peace can be heard on both sides. Peace demonstrations in Israel have been large and persistent. The cry for peace can be heard on the side of the Palestinians as well. It may not be in the form of demonstrations, but it is there just the same. What is missing, however, is a bipartisan coordinated effort by the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to push for a negotiated settlement.

The Israeli and Palestinian proponents of a negotiated settlement are not far apart on the main components of a settlement. Both agree that occupation by force cannot last; that both

have legitimate rights to a national home and self determination; that both people have a right to such a home in mandatory Palestine; that peace and security in the future depend on their mutual respect and recognition of each other's rights; and that the shortest cut to a solution is for the Israelis and the Palestinians to take matters into their own hands and speak directly to each other. Let us hope that they can join forces and publicly call on their leaders to take a more peaceful approach, negotiate a settlement, and begin to rebuild for a secure and peaceful future for their two peoples .

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