Israel/Palestine: The New Peace Movement

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1 Introduction

An Israeli-Palestinian peace movement, new in kind, is emerging around the platform of two states and the rights of Israelis and Palestinians to live in dignity and security. Courageous individuals are trying to break the cycle of fear, humiliation and incitement and reach out to partners on the other side. They are intent on filling the leadership vacuum left by the politicians. Their aim is to wrest the political agenda from the extremists and empower the majorities in both societies who want peace. Unlike earlier peace movements in the region, both sides are aware that they need each other to create political space; they both need to be able to show that it is possible to construct a civil society partnership and that there are alternatives to extremism.

The analysis of domestic politics on both sides is critical for understanding the escalation of the conflict over the past two years. The violence obscures the reality that as many Palestinians and Israelis support peace on the basis of mutual compromise as those who condone violence. The problem is that the politicians on both sides have failed to provide the leadership necessary to transform the yearning for peace into a political programme. Instead they allowed messianic extremists to hijack the political agenda and drag both societies into war.

The international community including outside governments and international institutions as well as civil society carries its share of the responsibility for the current state of affairs. The central contention of this paper is that any international strategy for finding a just and sustainable settlement to this conflict has to take as its starting point efforts to support, legitimise, and take advice from the emerging Israeli-Palestinian peace movement.

2 Context

2.1 Cycle of violence

Daily terror attacks, closures, house demolitions, assassinations and the use of lethal military force against civilian populations are just some of the horrors faced by Israelis and Palestinians since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 and the ensuing collapse of the Oslo peace process. Combined with the apparent lack of hope for the resumption of negotiations, continued settlement activity and economic decline, these tragedies are radicalising both societies. Extremists on both sides are growing ever stronger and are dictating the political agenda. Their actions seem to be mutually reinforcing. Even so, the sheer horror of an ever deepening cycle of violence is, at the same time, energizing efforts to find a peaceful solution both in the region and internationally.

There is broad support for violence in both societies (according to the last available polls, 52% of Palestinians support attacks against civilians inside Israel. On the other side 90% of Israelis support Operation Defensive Shield - a recent military operation resulting in large scale destruction and civilian casualties). Both view violence as a necessary last resort, an act of self defence, if not vengeance. Many even believe violence is the only way to peace. The Palestinians speak of the 'benefits' of establishing a 'balance of terror', the Israelis of the need to 'defeat terrorism.' Both are betting on reaching the others' pain threshold before their own. Both believe that violence may compel the others to concessions they would otherwise not contemplate. At the same time they assert that the other side's violence will never work. Israelis refer in this context to their military achievements against Arab states which they view as the only reason why the latter seized to contest Israel's right to exist or at least desisted from attempting to destroy it. The Palestinians refer to Israel's withdrawal form Lebanon, which they believe was precipitated by Hizbollah's attacks.

The violence involved is neither similar nor symmetric. Israel, with vastly superior resources, is inflicting the full spectrum of pain on the Palestinians from land seizures and denial of freedom of movement through economic strangulation, house demolitions, assassinations, all the way to total war. The Palestinians are basically limited in their choice of violent means to suicide attacks. Those are at once more random and more shocking than most of the weapons employed by Israel so far.

The inability to protect one's self, family and property produces an overwhelming sense of humiliation among Palestinians. This is the main psychological corollary to the death, destruction and depravation caused by the Israeli violence. Random and incomprehensible suicide attacks turn innocent everyday acts like going to the market or to a café into dangerous activities for ordinary Israelis. This produces fear, the main psychological result of Palestinian violence.

The cycle of violence is fed by humiliation, fear and mistrust. Both sides speak of a repeat of 1948. The Israelis perceive an existential threat to their country posed by the suicide bombers and the Islamists. The Palestinians fear that Israel has set out to finish the job of expelling them from their homes which it started in 1948. They view Israel's disproportionate responses to terrorist attacks as a deliberate policy of escalation which will culminate in ethnic cleansing if not genocide. Suicide attacks in the heart of Israeli cities and attacks by the Israeli Defence force (IDF) on refugee camps confirm these fears on both sides. Fears are also confirmed by the broad support in Israel (46% in a recent opinion poll) to the idea of 'transferring' Palestinians to other Arab states or by Palestinian insistence on the right of return to Israel proper and the broad support for Hamas (25% according to last opinion poll) which denies Israel's right to exist. School curricula, maps, newspaper columns, logos, everything is employed in this tit-for-tat cycle of recrimination.

Israeli and Palestinian support for violence, however, is matched by their desire for peace on the basis of mutual compromises (60-70% according to the latest available opinion polls). Nonetheless, both sides doubt the other's commitment to peace. Israelis describe the Palestinian posture during the peace process as the 'salami strategy' whereby Palestinians extract irreversible concessions from Israel only to table further demands. They refer to Arafat's rejection of the 'generous offer' made at

Camp David as the ultimate proof of this strategy. The Palestinians on the other hand counter that the Israelis never intended to end the occupation and used the peace process to buy time and create 'facts on the ground'. They point to continued and often intensified settlement activities in the territories, which were supposed to become part of the future Palestinian state throughout the peace process.

The political leadership, on both sides carries the bulk of the responsibility for this sorry state of affairs. Arafat and his successive Israeli counterparts failed to provide leadership and carry their respective societies towards peace. Politicians on both sides choose to play on extremism rather than mobilise the peace constituency in their respective societies. Without a responsible political leadership Palestinians and Israelis are falling prey to the peddlers of swift and violent solutions.

Part of the political discourse feeding into the cycle of violence are attempts to present the other side as a monolith and deny it any nuance. The Israelis assert that there is no difference between Arafat and Hamas, the nationalists and the Islamist. This underpins the claim that 'there is no partner' on the other side. They point to Arafat's support for groups involved in suicide attacks as proof. Even peace activists wonder why there were no demonstrations on the Palestinian side against suicide attacks. These accusations are mirrored by the Palestinians. They see no difference between Labour and Likud. After all, they point out, it was Barak who authorised the use of lethal force against largely unarmed demonstrators during the first days of the Intifada. The Palestinians also lament the silence of the Israeli peace movement. They reject as moral relativists Israeli peace activists who condition their struggle for ending the occupation with condemnation of terror attacks by the Palestinians.

Despite the hardening, radicalisation and rallying around the flag caused by the violence, the landscape on both sides is obviously much more textured than the politicians are prepared to admit.

2.2 The Palestinians

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is a failing if not failed state. Plagued as they are with corruption, incompetence and authoritarianism, Arafat and his cronies carry a significant share of the responsibility for the current state of affairs. Since their return to the territories in 1993 they have failed to deliver leadership or good governance to their people.

Before Oslo, the Palestinians in the occupied territories had a relatively well established civilian infrastructure, especially in healthcare and education. The PA was created to complement this infrastructure by providing security to both Palestinians and Israelis pending the final status agreement and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Significant efforts and resources were expended on establishing the trappings of statehood including an airport, television and a dozen security structures - National Security, General Intelligence, Preventive Security, Special Forces, Civilian Police, Force 17 and more. The PA, however, was prevented by the Oslo accords from protecting its citizens against the main threat to their security - Israeli soldiers and settlers. Moreover, its own security structures became an added threat to the safety and well being of ordinary Palestinians. The PA also failed in establishing a

monopoly on violence in its own territories and in providing security for Israelis from terrorist attacks emanating from there. Moreover, some of its members were probably involved in terrorist attacks in one capacity or the other.

Life for ordinary Palestinians deteriorated under Oslo . The PA's corruption and authoritarianism combined with accelerated settlement activity, by-pass roads and checkpoints eroded Palestinian faith and support for the peace process. Instead of promoting peace and explaining to the Palestinian public the costs involved Arafat maintained a belligerent populist discourse aimed at covering up for his regime's shortcomings while conducting negotiations with the Israelis behind closed doors. The result was that Arafat went to the final status negotiations at Camp David lacking the legitimacy, mandate or even tools to engage in serious negotiations.

Palestinian frustration burst into the open in September 2000 after Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Alaqsa/Temple Mount compound. Fuelled by a brutal Israeli response the Alaqsa Intifada quickly deteriorated into an ever deepening 'spasm of violence.' For most of the Intifada, the PA was rudderless, pandering to public discontent while at the same time trying to manage the violence in order to maintain international legitimacy. The PA today, under a relentless Israeli onslaught and continued challenges to its authority and legitimacy by its own people, is faced with a stark choice - reform or collapse.

Palestinians caught between brutal Israeli occupation on one side and the faltering Palestinian Authority on the other are flocking to the extremists. The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) garners the support of 25% of the population and has at times surpassed Arafat's mainstream Fatah faction in opinion polls. Hamas also controls most Palestinian campuses. Its charities, clinics and schools are omnipresent and indispensable for a growing number of Palestinians. Its military wing, Al-Qassam Brigades is responsible for the majority of suicide attacks. Unlike the PA, Hamas is very clear about its goals and how it seeks to achieve them. According to Hamas, suicide attacks constitute a legitimate response to Israeli occupation. Hamas does not recognise Israel's right to exist calling for the liberation of Palestine 'from the (Jordan) river to the (Mediterranean) sea' . It rejects the peace process as a cover for continued Israeli occupation and questions the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority, which it views as a proxy for Israel. Hamas considers the Intifada a success, citing the large number of Israeli casualties, declining tourism, weakened economy and growing support within Israel for a unilateral separation. Hamas's views on the peace process, the Palestinian Authority and the course of the Intifada dominate the Palestinian political discourse.

The Islamists do not distinguish among Israeli targets, be they military or civilian, settlers or residents of pre-1967 Israel. Hamas and Jihad conduct operations on both sides of the Green Line. This distinguishes them from the nationalist Palestinian factions including the PFLP, DFLP and Arafat's own Fatah. Despite differences in their stance vis-à-vis the Oslo peace process the nationalist groups generally recognise Israel's right to exist within its pre-1967 borders. Until this year, their armed groups have refrained from attacking Israeli civilians and from conducting operations across the Green Line. The nationalist factions strive to emulate what they perceive as Hizbollah's success in Southern Lebanon, the assumption being that Israel's unilateral

withdrawal came as a result of Hizbollah's relentless attacks on the occupying forces and not as a response to growing opposition within Israeli society to the occupation. In the current polarized atmosphere, violence is also perceived as an essential component of political legitimacy. Nationalist Palestinian factions express their internal political ambitions by competing with the Islamists in rhetoric and actions . The result is a blurring of boundaries between the two. This year the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades affiliated with Fatah was responsible for most suicide bombings on both sides of the Green Line.

2.3 The Israelis

Israel has had 6 prime ministers in the 8 years since Oslo, alternating between left and right, supporters and opponents of the peace process. All of them, however, failed to articulate to the Israeli public a clear vision of a final settlement with the Palestinians, let alone mobilise public support for the concessions entailed. Israeli leaders, not unlike their Palestinian counterparts, continued to treat the other side as adversaries and viewed the negotiating process as a zero-sum game where each side's gain is the other's loss. This translated into foot-dragging in implementing interim agreements and continued, and even accelerated, expansion of settlement activities under both Labour and Likud governments. Paradoxically, Labour Party leaders such as Ehud Barak considered such an approach as necessary to maintain 'support' for peace.

The peace process, which failed to bring tangible benefits to ordinary Palestinians, had a mixed impact on the lives of ordinary Israelis. On the one hand, the end of the first Intifada, prospects of peace and the lifting of the long standing Arab boycott of any company dealing with Israel sent the Israeli economy into an investment driven boom. On the other, Palestinian terror attacks escalated and became more lethal especially after the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995.

By the time of the Camp David talks in 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak seemed to have lost touch with the Israeli public. He maintained faith in clinching a final deal long after ordinary people gave up. The 'Barak offer' augmented later by Clinton and the Taba negotiations formed, by most accounts, a good basis for a final settlement. Arafat's failure to engage with it was not only a product of his own shortcoming but also a result of the context in which it was presented. After five years of broken promises, stalling, accelerated settlement expansion, land confiscation and by pass roads, the Palestinians had no faith left in their Israeli interlocutors.

The collapse of the Camp David negotiations and the Intifada came as a bad shock for Barak and his supporters on the left and precipitated a total collapse of the peace camp. They viewed Arafat's demand for the recognition of the right of return as an indication that the Palestinians did not want peace . This constituted a capitulation to the right and propelled Ariel Sharon, one of its most hawkish representatives to power.

Sharon came to power in February 2001 under the slogan of 'peace and security'. He declared that as a hawk with well established credentials he is uniquely positioned to deliver the 'painful compromises' needed to achieve peace. He proceeded to establish a national unity government with the Labour party to prove his intentions. What

followed, however, did not confirm any of these claims. At best Sharon's strategy seems to be aimed at postponing indefinitely any meaningful political negotiations with the Palestinian and by extension any concessions which may result from that . To this effect his demands for '7 days of quiet' and the 'dismantling of the terror infrastructure' have now been succeeded by a demand of extensive reforms in the PA and the removal of Arafat from the political scene. The 'painful compromises' Sharon is prepared to make at the end of the day will not include a critical element from the Palestinian point of view - the removal of settlement. He recently declared that 'Natzarim (an isolated settlement in the heart of Gaza) is Tel Aviv'. Whatever his strategy, Sharon's refusal to conduct 'negotiations under fire' and his 'rolling campaign' to destroy the 'terror infrastructure' led to a ratcheting up of the violence which culminated recently in operation 'Defensive Shield' - the reoccupation of the Palestinian territories and the de-facto annulment of the Oslo peace accords.

The escalating violence has created a situation in which the Israeli political discourse is dominated by the right and extreme right. If elections were to be held today the only viable challenger to Ariel Sharon is the even more hawkish Benjamin Natanyahu. Sharon's coalition government includes parties which advocate the expansion of settlements, the crushing of the PA and the reoccupation of the territories. Cabinet Ministers demand the expulsion of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians and attacks aimed at maximising Palestinian civilian casualties .

Having lost faith in the peace process many Israelis today are beholden to fast, unilateral solutions such as 'transfer' and 'unilateral separation'. The latter is based on the premise that neither a negotiated solution nor one based on an Israeli military victory is possible at the moment. In the meantime, something needs to be done to bring back security, especially to Israelis living inside the Green Line. This, according to supporters of this approach, can only be achieved through physical separation. The idea is not new. It was promoted by Rabin under the slogan of 'taking Gaza out of Tel Aviv' and under Barak under the slogan of 'us here, them there'. Part of the appeal of the 'unilateral separation' idea lies in its ambiguity. Depending on where the line of separation is drawn, it is supported by both left and right and even by the Palestinians. Opponents of the separation idea are also distributed along the political spectrum. Right wing opponents fear for the implied possibility of evacuating the settlements and giving up the dream of 'Greater Israel'. Left wing opponents object to the 'apartheid' connotations of an ethnic separation and its implications on Israel's own Arab population. Many doubt the very practicability of this concept given how intertwined both nations are, with nearly half a million Jews living in the occupied territories including Jerusalem's neighbourhoods and a million Arabs living in Israel.

3 The Peace Movement

Within the smouldering ruins of the Oslo peace process an Israeli-Palestinian-International peace movement is struggling to give a voice to the vast majority of people who crave peace but are being held hostage by the extremists.

The movement combines old and new actors and ideas. The main new element about the movement is that it is no longer limited to Israeli and international activists demonstrating in solidarity with the Palestinians. All three sides have come to realise

that they need each other for support and legitimacy. Israeli peace activists and politicians who want to offer an alternative to the policy of force and settlements need to show that there is a partner on the other side. The same is true for Palestinians who have the courage to stand up to the culture of Jihad. Even international activists seeking a deeper and more educated involvement by the US and Europe in the region need to show that there are Palestinians and Israelis who know the way out of this conflict and are prepared to fight for it.

As with the conflict itself the movement is not symmetric. There is a diverse and vibrant Israeli peace movement underpinned by a growing number of Israelis who realise that Sharon and his hard line policies are leading towards disaster. They are frightened not only by the escalating violence but by the relentless radicalisation and hardening within Israeli society. There is also growing unease towards army brutality in the occupied territories and the possibility of war crime charges being brought up against IDF soldiers and officers.

This is less the case in the Palestinian territories. The space left between escalating Israeli violence, the Hamas dominated political discourse and the authoritarianism of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is too small for the articulation of a viable peace agenda. There is, however, a hard core of courageous Palestinian activists both within the PA establishment and in civil society who consistently argue for non-violent resistance, against the hubris of 'armed struggle', the threat of political Islam and the corruption and authoritarianism of the PA.

The new movement is epitomised by the Peace Coalition established in July 2001. On the Israeli side it involves 24 groups, most notably Peace Now as well as the Parliamentary opposition represented by Meretz and the left wing of the Labour party. On the Palestinian side the coalition involves the main secular/nationalist factions and is spearheaded by Sari Nusseibeh, the PA representative in Jerusalem. The coalition also has an international component with support from activists and municipalities in Europe, particularly Italy and the Netherlands.

The coalition engages in three kinds of activities: Demonstrations, public diplomacy and peoples' diplomacy.

In May 2002 the coalition brought 60,000 people to the streets of Tel Aviv under slogans like 'the occupation kills us all' and 'get out of the territories, get back to normalcy.' It also organises regular vigils at the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem and outside the Ministry of Defence.

The Coalition also promotes Israeli Palestinian contacts. These contacts which all but stopped during the first 18 months of the Intifada are being resumed at various levels. There are semi-official contacts between experts involved in 'Track II' or secret negotiations. There are also people-to-people contacts between civic activists, academics and ordinary people and finally there are contacts between moderate politicians and peace minded public figures on both sides.

The international peace activists are involved in various projects aimed at protecting civilians. One group, the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) received

prominent coverage during the recent incursion by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) into Palestinian cities and refugee camps. Many ISM activists stayed in the area to protect their Palestinian colleagues and to provide food, water and medicine. Some of them suffered injuries, beatings and arrest at the hands of the IDF.

The aforementioned Peace Coalition march in Tel Aviv was, among other things, expressing support to a group of reserve officers who signed a declaration refusing to serve in the occupied territories. The officers who identify themselves as Zionists committed to defending Israel refused to serve in the territories 'for the purpose of dominating, expelling, starving and humiliating an entire people' . This petition signed, so far, by over 400 reserve officers and the broad support it received among Israelis (26% according to a recent poll published in Haaretz), is a qualitative new development. In the past even the most ardent supporters of peace stopped short of calling for disobedience in the army. Since the latest incursion in the territories 40 reserve officers have been jailed for refusing to participate in the operation. This is the highest number of such incidents in Israel's history according to Haaretz.

There are a number of new radical groups. These groups largely attract younger people and resemble in their tactics and approach the anti-capitalist movement. They call for direct action and civil disobedience and are mainly concerned with challenging the prevailing discourse and defending tolerance, pluralism and secularism in Israeli society form the encroaching radicalisation, hardening and racism. An example of these groups is Ta'ayush which works for co-operation between Arabs and Israelis on both sides of the Green Line. They organise convoys of supplies to Arab villages suffering under closure not only as an act of solidarity but as a way of exposing Israelis to the reality of the occupation.

Another such group is Green Line - Students Set the Border, which calls for an 'end to occupation for the sake of Israel's future'. In a pun on a typical settlement name, they pitched a tent in front of the Knesset called 'Ma'aleh Miyus' which translates as Upper Disgust (Haaretz, January 15, 2002). This action reflects a sentiment shared by an increasing number of Israelis as they see how a small number of extremist settlers are hijacking the political discourse and dragging the entire country into war.

There are two groups, which act exclusively from an Israeli perspective. The Council for Peace and Security which brings together 1,000 retired high ranking officers of the military and security establishments is an influential promoter of unilateral separation based on withdrawal from most of the West Bank and Gaza and the evacuation of most settlements. The council argues that this is the best way to achieve Israel's security objectives. Another such group is the 'Seventh Day' modelled after and including some of the original founders of the 'Four Mothers' movement. The latter was credited with launching the public campaign, which led ultimately to the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. The Seventh Day as the name implies, argues for the return to the pre Six Day War borders. They pointedly avoid contacting and working together with Palestinians to emphasise that their main motivation for calling to end the occupation is in Israel's interest.

4 The Peace Framework

Agreement on a common political framework for a final settlement is deemed by many of those involved in the peace movement as a critical condition for success. Such a framework would provide a focal point to mobilise the public in both societies and wrest the political agenda from the extremist. There is remarkable agreement among most protagonists both in regard to the general outline of the peace framework and the main principles for its implementation. There is even consensus regarding the steps needed to avoid the pitfalls, which hampered previous efforts and led to the collapse of the Oslo peace process.

The general principles behind the peace framework are the following:

- Violence does not work: the fortunes of any peace movement are closely linked to the level of violence and its acceptance in both societies. The realisation that violence does not work, be it Sharon's strong arm tactics or suicide attacks, is critical for the movement to emerge as a viable political force in both societies.
- Addressing issues leading to fear and mistrust between the two societies: 1948, transfer, settlement, right of return, Jerusalem, terrorism are some of the issues feeding the cycle of fear and mistrust. Any peace framework must address these issues head on. The use of 'constructive ambiguity' in Oslo led to misinterpretations and mutual recriminations. Formulations and solutions to the all these issues should be clear and unambiguous.
- Peace from below: past efforts faltered due to the failure to carry civil society. Instead of catering to the 'shareholders' - the majority in both societies which yearn for peace, populist politicians let the extremist fringe hijack the political agenda. By striving to rebuild the peace process from below, the movement provides Israelis and Palestinians with badly needed leadership. As such the movement is a response by civil society to the failure of the political classes on both sides.
- Transparency: secret negotiations in the past, provided politicians with opportunities for abuse. All the details of the negotiations should be made public. The process should be made transparent so that people on both sides could make an informed decision for peace.
- Broad appeal: the peace process in both societies is limited to the domain of intellectual elites and professional politicians. Even in the best times the active peace constituency does not spread much past the urban middle classes. This leaves vast swathes of both societies in the hands of extremists, be that the 1.5 million refugees on the Palestinian side or the Arabs, Russians and Mizrahim on the Israeli side. Neither a viable peace movement nor a sustainable settlement is possible without getting these groups on board.
- Mutuality: Palestinians, Israelis and internationals need to show they have a partner on the other side. Those involved in the peace movement need to demonstrate solidarity and loyalty to each other.
- Media and Education: the disproportionate reach of the extremists extends beyond state politicians to civil society. Media and education, in particular, have at times been mobilised to feed the cycle of incriminations, incitement and by extension, violence. The peace movement contests the influence of the extremists on Media and Education.

- Finality: the peace framework should start from the 'final settlement'. The gradual approach which characterised the Oslo process led both sides to withhold their most important cards until the last moment which undermined the entire process. Any settlement once accepted, is final and the parties will forfeit any future claims.
- Violence should not be allowed to derail the process. It is quite possible that violence will increase as the two communities inch closer to a final settlement. Radical elements in both societies are liable to do everything possible to prevent reconciliation. They should not be allowed hijack the agenda again.
- Regional and international framework: in order to achieve and sustain any Israeli/Palestinian agreement it has to be anchored in a regional and international framework. Future Palestinian and Israeli states will have to be part of a more integrated, open and democratic Middle East. International assistance will be critical especially in the areas of security, refugees and economic development.
- Economics: the deepening disparity between Palestinian and Israeli living standards is an important factor sustaining the conflict. It could also derail any future agreement. Any settlement will have to include an economic component to address this issue.

The actual framework for the final settlement builds on the Clinton Proposals of late 2000, the Taba negotiations in early 2001 and the Saudi proposal endorsed by the Arab League Summit in Beirut in early 2002. The main elements of such a framework are best represented in the platform of the afore-mentioned Peace Coalition:

- "The adoption of a two state solution which guarantees the Israeli and Palestinian peoples the right to live in human dignity and security in their own independent states, along the 1967 boundaries. Israeli settlements will be removed from the Palestinian state.
- The City of Jerusalem to contain two capitals for two states.
- A just and equitable resolution to the Palestinian Refugee issue will be reached."

There are other numerous variations which add detail to the above framework. Following are some of them:
Borders: Agreement on borders is along the Green Line of June 4, 1967 or along UN resolutions 242 and 338. Large settlement blocks along the Green Line are likely to be annexed to Israel in exchange for land of equal area and quality in Israel proper. The idea is to minimise the need for resettlement. One thorny issue in this context are the settlements/new Jewish neighbourhoods around Jerusalem like Gilo. The Israelis insist that these are 'omelettes' and should be annexed to Israel in any deal. The Palestinians object that no land in Israel proper would be adequate as a swap for these territories.
Jerusalem: Agreement on Jerusalem as a capital for the two states conceals some disagreement on detail. Both sides are in essence talking about dividing the city along ethnic lines while maintaining open borders between the two parts. Problems arise when it comes to sharing or dividing the old town and the holy sites, in particular. Proposals in this context range from shared, through international to divine

sovereignty. Both sides, however, agree that the differences on these issues are not insurmountable.

Refugees: There are three approaches to the refugee issues which are remarkably similar when it comes to their practical implementation. The first is based on rejecting the Palestinian right of return as a principle. Palestinians will have, however, the freedom to resettle within the new Palestinian state. The international community will assist those who choose to settle in the countries where they are currently based or in third countries. A small number will be resettled in Israel proper, based on family unification criteria. Israel would acknowledge the plight of the refugees but will not assume responsibility for it. The second approach recognises both Palestinian and Jewish rights of return to all of mandate Palestine. Both sides, however, undertake to exercise this right only within the confines of their respective state. Another formulation of this approach refers to the right of return to homeland as opposed to individual homes. The third approach recognizes only the Palestinian right of return but stipulates that it will be practiced in a way which respects the Jewish nature of the state of Israel. All three approaches take into account the critical Israeli demand that Israel has to remain a predominantly, if not 100% Jewish state.

4.1 Limitations

There are issues which could hamper the practical implementation of the two states framework even assuming that the disagreements detailed above are surmounted. The issues emanate from a fundamental difference in approach to the solution.

Palestinians aspire to a normal life with safety and dignity. They do not necessarily see the establishment of a Palestinian state as a precondition for achieving this goal. In fact, most Palestinians view the two state solution as a second best. Their real preference is for a bi-national state where they could live as equals with Jews over the entire area of mandate Palestine.

Israeli aspirations, in terms of seeking to live in peace and dignity, are not different from those of the Palestinians. The majority of Israelis, however, believe that they can only achieve peace and security in a Jewish state. A bi-national state would leave them exposed to the possibility of becoming a minority in the future and would thus bring back the fears, threats and suffering of the Diaspora days. This is tantamount to the destruction of Israel as a Zionist project.

Viewed from this perspective the two state solution is a compromise which reflects the balance of power between the two sides. A change in the balance in the future may spark renewed demands for the right of return at least by some Palestinians. It is in anticipation of such developments that Israelis insist on the finality of any settlement.

The main issues which complicate the implementation of the two states solutions are refugees, Israeli Arabs, borders, settlements and time:

- There are 4 million UN registered Palestinian refugees of which 1.5 million live in the West Bank and Gaza. Solving the refugee problem while taking into account the need for Israel to remain a Jewish state, entails an infringement or forfeiting of the individual rights of refugees to choose between returning to their homes or seeking compensation. Some argue that even the political representative of these refugees do not have the right to forfeit this right on their behalf. It is quite possible that sometime in the future these refugees will

seek to exercise their rights through legal means regardless of any political agreement.

- Israeli Arabs are Israeli citizens who regard themselves as Palestinians. Their status is quite complicated today. In most instances, they are treated as second class citizens. Israeli Arab riots in support of the Intifada were suppressed brutally. Thirteen protesters were killed by the police in October 2000. While some Israeli Arabs are accused of aiding and abating attacks targeted against Israeli civilians, others were killed and injured in such attacks. Once a Palestinian state is established at Israel's borders, the status of Israel's Arabs will be even more complicated. Many fear that they would be 'transferred' out of Israel. These fears intensified when Efrem Sneh, a Labour Minister in Sharon's cabinet proposed to include land inhabited by Israeli Arabs in future land swaps, thus achieving the added benefit of reducing the number of Arabs living in Israel. Many on the Israeli left and the Arabs vehemently oppose such proposals as they smack of 'transfer'. Given all the above, Israeli Arab political representatives want to be involved in the shaping of the final settlement. They offer to act as a conduit between the two sides. Many Israeli proponents of the two state solution disagree, insisting that the issues of Israel's Arabs is a matter of minority rights and should be kept separate from the conflict.

- The two societies, despite all the fighting and bad blood, are quite integrated especially in economic terms. The Palestinians are, however, much more dependent on Israel than the other way around. Thousands of Palestinian labourers depend on jobs in Israel. About 90% of Palestinian output is exported to Israel. The Palestinians will need the borders between the two states to remain transparent for people and goods. This sentiment will not necessarily be shared by the Israelis for both economic and security reasons. With Israeli GDP per capita exceeding Palestinian GDP by more than 10 times, the two state solution once implemented will create a 'north-south' challenge of particular intensity. Another issue relating to borders is the fact that under all scenarios the Palestinian state will consist of two separate entities (Gaza and the West Bank). There are proposals for building bridges and tunnels linking the two but none of them is really sufficient to address the awkwardness of this arrangement.

- Settlements: There are 400,000 settlers in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. They control almost half the land in the Occupied Territories. Their numbers and influence on Israeli politics are growing in a mutually reinforcing dynamic. Yet any settlement acceptable to the Palestinians will have to involve the evacuation of tens of thousands of settlers. This is bound to be politically destabilising for Israel and may even lead to civil strife.

- The two state solution has a limited shelf life. In the mid to long term, two processes may render the implementation of this solution impractical. On the one hand, the faster Palestinian population growth rate means that if a solution is delayed there will be a Palestinian majority within the borders of Israel. On the other hand delay means that there will be more settlers and they will be more rooted on land which is supposed to become a Palestinian state.

Despite all these shortcomings, agreement on the two state framework and its underlying principles is a critical element for building peace from below. It addresses issues which are contributing to the atmosphere of fear and distrust in both societies.

By agreeing on a common platform the parties will be 'formulating' their partners on the other side. A rally by the Peace Coalition in February 2002 featured Jerusalem's PLO representative Sari Nusseibeh. He has stirred controversy in Palestinian society for being the first to publicly question the wisdom of a literal interpretation of the right of return within a peace framework built on a two states approach. He repeated this message in the Tel Aviv rally by stating that 'The path to peace is through the return of the refugees to the State of Palestine and the return of the settlers to the State of Israel.' This message reassures Israelis that the Palestinians will not seek the 'demographic' destruction of Israel if they are given a state of their own in the occupied territories. Similarly, calls by the Israeli peace movement for an end to occupation including the evacuation of settlements reassures Palestinians that Israelis are not seeking to complete the War of Independence/Nakba of 1948 by expelling Palestinians across the Jordan river.

5 Outside Intervention

Outside intervention is a critical element of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US, Europe, UN, Arab States, 'Arab Street' and the Jewish Diaspora contribute directly and indirectly to the current state of affairs. The international community also holds the key to addressing it, especially since the political leaders on both sides seem incapable of stopping the cycle of violence on their own.

Interventions, so far, reveal a need to better inform international actors about the situation in the region and the needs of both Palestinians and Israelis. The response by the 'Arab Street' to the suffering of the Palestinians is often translated into support for Hamas and the suicide bombers. The desire by the Jewish Diaspora to support Israel is translated into support for Sharon's policy of fire and brimstone. Pressure on Israel by Europe or the UN often alienates the Israeli public without providing any relief for the Palestinians. The US war on terrorism is translated by the Israeli right into a green light to wage war on civilians in the occupied territories.

The US has a historically established monopoly on mediation in the Middle East. Despite efforts to act in a balanced manner the US does not hide its view of Israel as a strategic ally. US leaders consistently state that they will always stand by Israel. The Americans ability to act as an objective broker in the Middle East has recently been eroded by two developments. First the American Jewish community which has substantial impact on US policies in the Middle East has lurched to the right. This is a direct result of the cycle of violence and is an extension of the process taking place in Israel itself. The second reason is September 11. The uncompromising rhetoric, the division of the world into supporters and opponents of terrorism and the open ended nature of the war on terrorism mean that US officials cannot object to Ariel Sharon's brutal response to Palestinian suicide attacks without appearing hypocritical.

This points peace activists to three directions for future work. First, there is a need to better inform and educate the Jewish community in the US and elsewhere in the West. A distinction should be made between supporting Israel and supporting the hawks in the Israeli government. Obviously for this work to be effective the Israeli peace movement needs to prove its relevance as a viable alternative. Second, the rhetoric of the war on terrorism needs to be revisited. The Middle East is only one of the areas which reveal the limits and dangers of this approach. Third, while the US remains a critical component of any Middle East settlement, both as the world's largest power and Israel's closest friend, the need for broadening international intervention has never been greater. Europe, the UN, Arab states and communities throughout the world

have a contribution to make both in reaching a settlement to the conflict and in its implementation.

Arab communities, both in the region and in the West, have undergone a process of radicalisation and hardening as a result of the current escalation of the conflict. The violence is contributing to a siege mentality sweeping through the 'Arab street', a sense of deep frustration and resentment towards the West as the main culprit for the region's economic, political and cultural decline. The plight of the Palestinians at the hands of the US-supported Israeli government has become both a focal point and outlet for all these frustrations. A vicious cycle is emerging. The chances for peace between Israelis and Palestinians will be slim if the former continue to feel threatened by the 300 million Arabs around them. Moreover, the radicalised Arab communities may become the vehicle through which this conflict can assume global proportions. The opposite is also true. The festering and intensifying conflict will continue to be a major obstacle to democratic reforms and development in the Arab world. The best way to break this cycle is to involve the Arab communities in finding a solution to the conflict. Most importantly ordinary Israelis need assurances like the one implied in the Saudi peace initiative, that they can count on friendly relationships with their neighbours, if there was a just settlement with the Palestinians. Arab support for the Palestinians should be channelled towards promoting non-violence, democratic reforms and economic development.

Europe is tied to Israel with an association agreement. It is Israel's largest trading partner. Due to geographic proximity and large Arab and Jewish communities Europe is directly affected by the conflict. This should be reflected in a deeper European involvement in the peace process.

There is broad agreement as to the need to broaden international involvement in the peace process and that this involvement is dictated as much by self interest in preventing the spread of the conflict as it is by compassion with the two afflicted peoples. There is, however, disagreement even within the peace camp as to the goals, principles and methods of such involvement. On the one side most Palestinians view international intervention as a way of mitigating the imbalance between the two sides. They believe the international community should intervene to protect their lives, property and human rights from Israeli violations. In this vein the Palestinians would like to see the UN Security Council imposing and enforcing a solution on the two sides based on the two states framework. Short of that they would like to see military, economic, political and cultural sanctions imposed on Israel and targeted especially at the army and the settlers. Palestinians believe such pressure would also induce ordinary Israelis to act more energetically for ending the occupation.

Most Israelis disagree. They believe that international pressure and sanctions in particular would only feed into the historical sense of vulnerability among Israelis and would have the opposite result of unifying them around the extremists. They argue that neither Europe nor the US have the moral authority to impose sanctions or an unacceptable solution on Israel. They believe that international involvement should focus instead on creating the conditions for the two sides to reach agreement. Once a framework agreement is in place the international community could and should be involved in implementing it and monitoring compliance.

As the violence of the past two years intensified there have been some shifts on both sides in this regard. More and more Palestinians are coming to understand that a solution is unlikely to succeed if it is not embraced by the Israeli public regardless of international pressure. Many Israelis are beginning to view international intervention

as more than just a boost for the other side. A recent poll found an unprecedented 56% of Israelis in favour of stationing US-led international forces in the Palestinian Territories .

There are many areas, however, where international intervention is approved and sought after by both sides. Both sides agree on the need for Arab states and the international community to pressure and assist in the transformation and development of the Palestinian Authority into a precursor to a viable state. Likewise they would like to see more restraints put on Sharon especially by the US. Most importantly, however, the international community is expected to support and legitimise forces on both sides working for a peaceful solution.

6 Conclusion

Time is running out in the Middle East. Every suicide attack, Israeli military operation and new settler outpost reproduces fear, hostility and mistrust, and thus makes the vision of Palestinians and Israelis living in peace and dignity in the Holy Land harder and harder to realise. Moreover, if the current escalation continues, violence is unlikely to be contained within the confines of the region for much longer.

Apart from the unprecedented level of violence, the main new characteristic of the current stage of the conflict is the remarkable agreement among Palestinians and Israelis on the general contours of the final settlement. The two state solution as outlined in the Clinton Proposal of 2001, the ensuing Taba negotiations and the latest Arab League plan is not perfect. It does, however, offer a goal and a mobilizing framework for peace efforts. As veteran US State Department expert on the Middle East, Aaron Miller points out - The problem today is not the lack of light at the end of the tunnel. It is the lack of a tunnel to reach the light.

The main lesson to be learnt from the collapse of Oslo is the failure of the politicians to carry Israeli and Palestinian civil society behind the peace process. Without public engagement even the best peace plan would have scant chance of success.

Behind this emerging consensus is a new Israeli-Palestinian peace movement, which is, unlike in the past, a genuine civil society partnership. The one glimmer of hope can be found among the courageous individuals who are working against the tide of violence to mobilise the Israeli and Palestinian public for peace and to wrest the political agenda from the extremists. Any international, regional or local strategy to jumpstart the peace process has to be centred on strengthening the role of those individuals