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Toward Israeli-Palestinian Disengagement

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In the spring of 1989, the government of Israel offered for the first time to negotiate an interim agreement concerning the West Bank and Gaza Strip with a purely Palestinian delegation. Previously, Israel had maintained that Palestinian participation in peace talks would only be possible under the auspices of Egypt, or preferably Jordan.

Israel's unprecedented willingness to recognize Palestinians as an independent actor with a critical role to play in peace talks marks a turning point of the utmost importance in the peace

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• *Israel's proposal for Palestinian elections stems from a realization that the status quo is not tenable and a fear that the intifadah could escalate to a more violent pattern of confrontation.*

• *Despite continued controversy over its details, the elections proposal indicates several new elements in Israel's position: recognition — for the first time — that an interim agreement for Palestinian self-government can be negotiated with a purely Palestinian delegation; and an implied readiness to legalize the PLO-affiliated local leadership.*

• *Ideally, elections are the best way to proceed. They would enhance the status of the local Palestinian leadership, shifting the balance of forces within the PLO in favor of the insiders who are more supportive of interim arrangements. But any agreement on elections is probably months away; in the meantime, to avoid further deterioration of the situation, the United States should encourage an initiative to complement diplomatic efforts to reach an Israeli-Palestinian understanding on elections.*

• *This initiative would involve Israel's administrative disengagement from the territories following a series of narrow agreements with local Palestinian bodies. Institutional disengagement would end a situation in which the weakened Israeli Civil Administration and the PLO-affiliated Unified Command's shadow administration coexist in the midst of confrontation. If elections do not take place, this process would bestow control over aspects of autonomy upon those Palestinians who would win elections, were they held. Some of the burden of occupation would be removed, Israeli-Palestinian friction would hopefully be reduced and a new channel for negotiations would be opened.*

• *Transfer of authority to the local leadership on a sectorial basis would precede a formal agreement. The process would not necessarily be part of a political package; rather, it would be an on-the-ground adjustment, pending the formal negotiation of an interim Israeli-Palestinian agreement. It would not serve as a substitute for elections, but as an incentive for both sides to move forward and tackle more complicated political issues. The external PLO would find it hard to oppose this process since it would not entail political concessions, but a fulfillment of the declared objective of creating new Palestinian institutions in the territories.*

process. The new status accorded the Palestinians is not the result of any redefinition of Israel's objectives; Israel still rejects independent statehood for the Palestinians and direct dealings with the PLO. This certainly diminishes the significance of the Israeli shift but does not mean it is merely a tactical maneuver, since it constitutes a departure from the long-entrenched policy that ruled out the Palestinians as an equal partner in the peace process.

The basic change in Israel's approach is reflected in the proposal to hold elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for an indigenous Palestinian leadership that will negotiate with Israel the details of an interim agreement for the territories. This proposal, first presented by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in April 1989, embodies Israel's acceptance of the fact that the neighboring Arab countries cannot serve, or are not interested in serving, as Israel's primary negotiating partners. Israel is, in effect, inviting the Palestinians to represent themselves in peace talks and no longer seeks to take up their affairs with others.

From the moment an official proposal for an Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement was tabled, the old concepts of the "Jordan Option" and "Egyptian Patronage" were removed from the agenda, even though Israel still aspires to achieve a final peace settlement with Jordanian participation. The question is no longer whether Israel recognizes the Palestinians as a partner, but rather which Palestinians Israel will negotiate with, and what degree of overt affiliation will they maintain with the PLO.

Israel's recognition of the Palestinians as interlocutors and its abandonment of attempts to circumvent them came a short while after the PLO modified its own position by accepting U.N. Security Council resolution 242 and calling for a negotiated settlement with Israel that includes security arrangements. The evolution of the PLO's position — to the point of adopting the principle of a two-state-solution — signified

a process similar to the shift in Israel's policy: the PLO has conceded that a settlement is possible only by dealing directly with Israel; it is beginning to recognize that Israeli withdrawal cannot be secured without explicitly recognizing Israel's right to exist.

Without trying to assess Shamir's or PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's tactical considerations, and without attempting to judge the sincerity of their public statements, one must conclude that at least at the declarative level there has been significant movement on both sides. Israel — despite its hope that elections will exclude the PLO from the peace process — has recognized the Palestinians as the partner for an immediate agreement, while the PLO has in fact recognized Israel. The PLO is backing away from its goal of eliminating Israel while Israel is reassessing its attempts to ignore Palestinian nationalism. A process of **qualified mutual acknowledgment** is actually taking place: Israel is limiting its recognition of the Palestinian partner to the residents of the West Bank and Gaza and continues to disqualify the PLO, while the PLO predicates its recognition of Israel on Israeli acceptance of a Palestinian state as the outcome of the peace process.

Two additional components have emerged alongside this qualified mutual acknowledgment. For the first time, Israel is willing to re-examine basic concepts of the Camp David Accords. Also, it is tolerating indirect communications with the PLO over its proposal, either via U.S. mediation or via PLO-affiliated activists in the territories.

Divergence From Camp David

The election plan implies an Israeli willingness to change clauses from the Camp David Accords in four central areas:

- Negotiations on the structure and powers of the Palestinian Self-Governing Authority will be conducted with a Palestinian delegation

chosen from among the residents of the territories. In contrast, Camp David provided for talks between Israel on the one side and Jordan and Egypt on the other, with Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and "other Palestinians as mutually agreed" included in the Jordanian and Egyptian delegations.

- Elections in the territories will be held prior to the talks on an interim agreement, rather than after the agreement has been negotiated as stipulated in the Camp David Accords. The elected Palestinian representatives will not only be asked to serve in the institutions of the Self-Governing Authority, but will also take part from the outset in defining their powers and responsibilities.

- Israel's proposals embody, albeit implicitly, a willingness to forgo Jordanian and/or Egyptian participation in the management of the institutions of autonomy, such as the strong police force envisaged in Camp David. In other words, Palestinians may negotiate exclusively with Israel and the Self-Governing Authority will also be exclusively Palestinian.

- The door has been opened, again not explicitly, to the possibility that the role of the Palestinian negotiators may be changed for final status. While Camp David stipulated that final status talks would be held with Egypt, Jordan and the elected representatives of the Palestinians, the Israeli proposal raises the possibility of a leading role for the Palestinians in these talks. Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin has suggested that in the final status talks, the Palestinians' role will be equal to Jordan's.

Indirect Talks with the PLO

In terms of the composition of the elected Palestinian delegation, an even more important change has occurred in Israel's stand. Israel has not only turned a blind eye to indirect talks with the PLO on conditions for elections, but it has also begun to view the pro-PLO *intifadah* leader-

ship in the territories as a tolerable — if not desirable — partner for an immediate interim arrangement. The elections proposal marks Israel's tacit a priori acceptance of a victory by PLO-backed candidates and thus implies a willingness to turn over the administration of a Self-Governing Authority to a leadership that sees itself as subordinate to the PLO and spares no opportunity to declare that it will remain so. In short, Israel is prepared to turn the civil administration of the territories over to PLO loyalists, with the elections serving primarily as a mechanism to carry out the transfer of authority. Taking its proposal at face value, Israel is inviting the PLO to sanction an interim settlement that will grant its supporters a position of responsibility and legitimacy.

This was prompted by Israel's failure to find an alternate, i.e., non-PLO, negotiating partner. King Hussein's decision to sever Jordan's legal and administrative links with the West Bank put an end to hopes that he might serve as an interlocutor for the Palestinians. In the course of the *intifadah*, it became clear that Hussein's proteges in the West Bank had lost their power base and would not be in a position to act as a recognized Palestinian leadership. Palestinian mayors, appointed by Israel with Jordan's approval, and others who advocated allegiance to Jordan, were swept aside by events and did not attempt to challenge PLO supporters for political hegemony. Efforts to encourage other leaders who might compete with the PLO also reached a dead end. Israel abandoned the Village Leagues scheme in 1983-1984, and ceased its covert encouragement of the Muslim Brotherhood on the eve of the uprising when it realized that the threat posed by Muslim fundamentalism was just as grave as that posed by the PLO.

In the wake of its aborted attempts to nurture a Palestinian leadership outside the framework of the PLO, Israel is now trying to draw a distinction between the outside and the inside PLO. Moreover, Israel is modifying its response to the *intifadah*, away from attempts to crush it

and toward a willingness to talk with the uprising's leaders. The elections proposal represents an attempt to embrace the *intifadah* by inviting Palestinian activists, who have established semi-clandestine institutions in the territories, to establish a recognized public leadership.

Israel has tried for many years to thwart attempts to institutionalize a pro-PLO leadership in the territories, classifying the actions of pro-PLO activists as "political subversion." This policy included dramatic actions such as the suppression of the National Guidance Committee, sacking of elected mayors, expulsion of prominent activists and, since the beginning of the *intifadah*, the detention of the Unified Command's members, restrictions against trade unions and banning of the *Shabiba* (PLO youth groups) and Popular Committees.

Yet, in recent months an opposite trend has begun to emerge. Senior officials in the Israeli government have initiated meetings with pro-PLO Palestinians, some of whom also serve as activists in the *intifadah*. Israeli security officials have ignored contacts between local Palestinians and PLO officials outside of the territories and have refrained from detaining selected Palestinian personalities, despite the existence of sufficient evidence to convict them of crimes. In practice, Israel has significantly diluted its official ban on the PLO and its refusal to engage in a dialogue with that organization. Israel's leaders have ignored repeated declarations by the inside leadership that it sees itself as an arm of the PLO.

Elections: A Palestinian Idea

The gradual removal of Israel's prohibition against contacts with pro-PLO figures coincided with the decision to adopt their initiative for elections: the elections idea first originated with PLO loyalists in East Jerusalem at the end of the first month of the *intifadah*. The evidence indicates that these Palestinian figures consulted with the PLO's Executive Committee while for-

mulating their ideas. Free municipal elections was one of 14 demands set forth by Hanna Siniora and several PLO-affiliated activists on January 14, 1988; the demand was also included in early uprising flyers distributed by the Unified Command. The well-publicized article by Basam Abu-Sharif – a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and a close adviser to Arafat – that appeared in May 1988 suggested that a referendum on Palestinian leadership be held among the inhabitants of the occupied territories. Thus, the Palestinian initiative for an election or referendum, which would inevitably confirm the hegemony of the PLO and its supporters in the territories, was adopted by Israel in a somewhat different form more than a year after it was first advanced by the inside PLO-affiliated leadership.

In both the Unified Command and Israel's proposals the elections process is linked to a new interim arrangement in the territories. In Siniora's 14 Points, as well as in the uprising flyers, the elections were part of a series of demands that center on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from densely populated areas and the relaxation of administrative sanctions aimed at the Palestinian population. Municipalities headed by elected PLO-affiliated activists would operate as local self-governing bodies. In other words, this proposal was for the creation of a rudimentary self-rule on the municipal level, as Israeli forces and the military government stepped aside.

In the Israeli version, the elections are intended to lead to self-rule, together with the thinning out of Israel's military presence, the IDF's withdrawal from population centers and a reduction in the military government's intervention in Palestinian affairs.

There are remarkable similarities in the way the two sides view the nature of an interim settlement, be it in the form of a formal contract, as sought by Israel, or through an informal undertaking, as proposed by Siniora and his associ-

ates. Both suggest an Israeli **administrative withdrawal** in favor of a local Palestinian self-government of one type or another. Of course, this should not blur the profound disagreements that exist over a final settlement and over the link between the interim stage and the final settlement. Still, it appears that without even engaging in a serious dialogue, both Israel and the local PLO-affiliated leaders have come up with some consensus: an interim stage based on a withdrawal of Israeli administrative control and a retention of an Israeli security presence. This would result in a lessening of friction between Israeli forces and the local residents who would be endowed through elections with new authority and resources.

During the second stage of the *intifadah*, the PLO came up with much more ambitious demands, emphasizing that the *intifadah* will not end until the establishment of a Palestinian state. Yasser Arafat had by then rejected the principle of an interim settlement and sought to sustain — and if possible increase — the momentum of the uprising. This trend in the thinking of the PLO's leadership in Tunis echoed Israel's approach during the *intifadah*'s first year, which ruled out any concessions or dialogue as long as the violence continued. Yet having concluded that the *intifadah* now necessitates a political initiative, Israel is resuscitating the idea originally proposed by pro-PLO activists in the territories. They are the ones who first called for elections and what may be referred to as administrative withdrawal. Israel is now simply bringing the idea back into the political arena.

Cohabitation and Dual Administration

After 21 months of violent confrontation, Israel and the Palestinian *intifadah* have reached a state of tenuous stalemate. The present stage of the *intifadah* is an ongoing static clash of mutual attrition. There are swings in the level of violence and the frequency of incidents, as well as in the number of casualties, but these have not produced a qualitative change in the nature

of the conflict nor in the gains derived by either party. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have nearly exhausted their capabilities to coerce each other; they have reached a state of indecision. Israel is unable to enforce calm in the territories, while the Palestinians are incapable of escalating beyond the current level of disturbances. Only the introduction of firearms by the Palestinians is likely to change the situation, turning a civilian insurgency into a civil war.

Dual administration now exists in the territories: the IDF's Civil Administration and the "shadow government" of the *intifadah*'s Popular Committees. The use of concentrated force by the IDF — e.g., the imposition of curfews or the declaration of closed military zones — can reassert Israeli authority in any town or village. But as soon as the thinning-out of forces takes place, the competing, semi-clandestine Palestinian apparatus re-appears. Likewise, Popular Committee activists often stage impressive demonstrations of force in various localities — massive parades, show trials of collaborators or the recruiting of volunteers and fundraising. But as soon as Israeli soldiers return, the situation reverts to ambiguity and uncertainty.

The Palestinian population therefore lives under two administrations simultaneously and cannot sever its ties to either. The Israeli military government continues to provide vital civilian services including electric power, water, telephone and medical services. The shadow system of the Popular Committees, in turn, has almost complete freedom, particularly at night, not only to punish, but also to provide aid and support to the Palestinian population, especially by assisting the families of those killed, wounded and detained or those who have resigned from their jobs in the course of the uprising.

Reality has forced both sides to accept this uneasy coexistence and to concede that they must share power. Neither side is attempting to dislodge the other completely. On the contrary,

it appears that both have realized that an all-out administrative battle is futile and that they should therefore seek to reduce the friction arising from the dual regime. The best example is the partial strike in effect since the first days of the *intifadah*. Israel long ago abandoned attempts to break the strike, which closes Palestinian businesses every day at noon. Israel has also stopped trying to prevent the weekly general strikes called for in the *intifadah* leaflets.

The Unified Command has essentially abandoned its plan for general civil disobedience — of even limited duration — that would have entailed severing all ties to the Israeli administration, i.e., relinquishing services, jobs in Israel and various permits that are provided by the military government. Also, the Unified Command's more modest goal of initiating a voluntary boycott of Israeli products has yielded only meager results. 15,000 Palestinian employees who stayed with the Civil Administration still receive salaries from Israel and get an additional allowance paid out of PLO funds deposited in Jordanian banks; they usually do not show up for work on strike days.

The *intifadah* leadership still calls upon the population to refuse payment of various Israeli taxes, but has taken no steps against those who have ignored the directive under Israeli pressure. Likewise, Israel has not actively prevented fundraising by the Popular Committees. The *intifadah* leadership's withdrawal of proposals for burning identity cards and for the creation of an alternative education system and local administration of agricultural production should be seen as further evidence that they no longer see themselves capable of replacing the Civil Administration. At the same time, there is a growing Israeli willingness to countenance the existence of hundreds of Popular Committees so long as they are not involved in particularly violent activities. Israel has not engaged in systematic attempts to suppress an emerging Palestinian health care system or other community services. Israel has even overlooked the organi-

zation of local police forces in some communities. Once frequent search-and-arrest operations in villages have been suspended for long periods, and the thinning-out of IDF forces in the territories — largely because of operational constraints — has inevitably resulted in greater freedom of action for Palestinians.

Palestinians are aware that the *intifadah* has succeeded in undermining and delegitimizing Israeli rule and in creating a competitive administration. But at the same time, they appear to realize that in its present form, the uprising cannot bring about additional changes in the situation, except possibly through a prolonged attrition that would entail great suffering for the population. The Palestinians cannot prevent free movement of the IDF or protect themselves from its economic and bureaucratic sanctions. The *intifadah* leadership cannot develop an administrative system more comprehensive than the current one and is cognizant of the danger involved in overburdening the Palestinian population, whose standard of living has dropped 30 to 40 percent during the uprising.

Meanwhile, there is a growing realization in Israel that military means alone will not end the uprising. Israelis are also aware that the Civil Administration — once regarded as the hallmark of an enlightened occupation — is deteriorating into a tool of punishment. Moreover, any effort to limit the power of the Palestinian shadow administration would require mass arrests on a scale much larger than in the past. Such an effort would most likely result in more violent clashes, with no assurance that, as happened before, a new echelon of activists would not appear to replace the leaders detained in a crackdown.

As long as the Palestinians refrain from using firearms, no real change in the *intifadah* stalemate is likely. In the absence of a political settlement and as violent incidents continue, the two adversarial administrations will continue to exist side by side, with neither able to displace the

other. The PLO-affiliated shadow administration, emboldened by the realization that Israel no longer seeks to uproot it, will undoubtedly continue to seek new avenues for growth. This shadow administration — despite the confusion in its ranks — is engaged in creating quasi-militias and strike forces armed with clubs for violent actions. It is also encouraging underground courts, providing welfare and health care and distributing funds smuggled in from abroad.

Israel has given up some control over the population already and, at certain times, the army has stretched its forces so thin that it created the impression that the military had lost control over remote villages and roads. There are gaps in the Israeli administration, especially as a result of mass resignations by members of village councils and Arab employees of the Civil Administration. The courts, customs, licensing and tax collection have been partially paralyzed, while the local police have almost completely collapsed.

In short, there is already a certain degree of self-rule in the territories. Conditions vary from place to place and from time to time. But this **crude autonomy** is a fait accompli. The shadow administration wields considerable authority in most places, and even when Israeli troops are present it does not vanish completely. The operational echelons of the military government have already been in contact with members of the local Popular Committees to reach gentlemen's agreements on steps to reduce friction and violent confrontations. Some of the agreements on re-opening of schools were of this nature. The current situation constitutes an experiment in **cohabitation** in the midst of confrontation.

The present deployment of the IDF in the territories is intended mainly to curb violence and to prevent further erosion of Israel's control; it is not an attempt to restore the old order. Restoration of the status quo ante is no longer

an objective. Whatever grip Israel retains over the population depends on its military presence, rather than on the Civil Administration. Cycles of re-occupation of different localities are continuously necessary. One of the *intifadah's* leaders offered this assessment: "The military government is carried on the shoulders of the soldiers everywhere they go, and disappears when they leave."

The concept of administrative withdrawal already exists in part. However, the vacuum created by the steady weakening of Israeli authority is only sporadically replaced by crude autonomy, contributing to the sense of instability and chaos. Israel has relinquished control to some extent, without setting conditions and without coordinating with the rival administration that has emerged during the *intifadah*.

A New Local Leadership

The *intifadah* has given rise to a loose organizational pyramid in the territories. The Unified Command stands at the top and issues the uprising flyers containing instructions and setting detailed timetables for implementation by the Popular Committees scattered throughout the territories. There is no systematic hierarchical structure. The Unified Command, rather than functioning as a forward operational headquarters, serves mainly as a supreme coordinating committee for the various PLO factions operating inside the territories and as a liaison to the external PLO leadership, while the Popular Committees are not necessarily part of a strictly defined vertical chain of command. This network is, in effect, the new local leadership in the territories.

Hamas, which represents the Islamic movement in the territories, contests the authority of the Committees and the Unified Command, but nearly the entire Palestinian population follows the orders of the Unified Command and regards the Popular Committees as the local authorities. The traditional leadership, centered

on urban notables and village mukhtars, has surrendered its influence unconditionally by complying with the Unified Command's instructions to resign from municipal and rural councils. The Popular Committees took control of cooperatives and housing associations, waterworks, the marketing of agricultural products and other institutions in their villages.

The new local leadership arose from the infrastructure of PLO factions in the territories. This infrastructure consisted of semi-clandestine organizations, such as the *Shabiba* youth movement and various Committees of Volunteers, as well as cells in underground terrorist networks and the different PLO front organizations. The latter include trade unions, charitable associations, newspapers, information offices and universities, all of which are partially funded by the PLO. The Popular Committees and the Unified Command are thus composed of skilled and dedicated individuals that distinguished themselves prior to the *intifadah's* outbreak by operating in the grey area between underground and overt nationalist activity. In contrast, the traditional pre-*intifadah* leaders derived their power and influence from aristocratic status, economic success, Jordanian favor or Israeli patronage.

Most Palestinians view the *intifadah* leadership as fulfilling a dual role: it represents the PLO in the uprising and enforces revolutionary discipline in the territories, but also acts as the local population's advocate in PLO debates, safeguarding its interests whenever the external PLO embarks on adventurous or callous policies that run contrary to the interests of Palestinians in the territories. The public, though it may not know most of the important activists by name, is aware that they were not appointed by the PLO. Their legitimacy is not based solely on recognition by the external PLO; rather, it derives in large part from the fact that they have risen within the PLO-affiliated system on their own merits and often at considerable personal sacrifice.

It is precisely because no one in the territories doubts their loyalty to the PLO that the local leaders are expected to act as a break on the PLO, and even to take initiatives without waiting for orders from Tunis. It is precisely because of their impeccable nationalist credentials that they can disagree with the PLO leadership in Tunis. They loudly proclaim "we are PLO," while permitting themselves the privilege of disobeying Yasser Arafat and his colleagues from time to time.

The PLO: Inside vs. Outside

However, there is no chance in the foreseeable future that a wedge can be driven between the external PLO and the Unified Command. Loyalty to the PLO is regarded by the insiders as the embodiment of patriotic duty, the cement that solidifies the indivisibility of the Palestinian cause, the unity between those who have remained on their land and those who live in the diaspora. Loyalty to the PLO is the guarantee against an Israeli policy of "divide and rule," and a solution that would benefit one part of the Palestinian people at the expense of another. As a Palestinian from the territories explained, Palestinians are not looking for a solution for one quarter of the Palestinian people on one fifth of the territory of Palestine; they seek a Palestinian passport for any Palestinian who wants one. To maintain the sacred unity of ranks, the Unified Command has been willing to keep quiet about the many disagreements it has had with the PLO during the *intifadah*. However, insider allegiance extends primarily to the symbol and framework of the PLO, and not necessarily to specific policies or directives.

The leadership in the territories rightfully maintains that it has had a far-reaching impact on PLO policy, to the point of compelling the PLO to change fundamental aspects of its doctrine. Not only has the *intifadah* leadership surprised Israel with its new methods of confrontation, it has also surprised Arafat by revolutionizing the PLO's agenda. The Unified Command

has maintained that armed struggle will not be a component in the uprising and has complained to the external PLO about its continued terrorist attacks. Contrary to the prognosis of Arafat and his associates, the uprising leadership has turned the West Bank and Gaza Strip into the main and almost exclusive battlefield in the struggle with Israel. Arafat's *summud* (steadfastness) slogan — which meant that the Palestinians in the territories should remain on their land and wait passively for the PLO to liberate them — has been replaced by a different type of *summud* slogan that calls for initiative and activism on the part of Palestinians in the territories. The uprising leadership saw pictures of the PLO's tanks rusting in the Sudan and Yemen and turned to the Molotov cocktails that PLO brochures had warned them to avoid because of their unreliability. They developed concepts such as civil disobedience, public repentance by collaborators, boycott campaigns and peaceful mass demonstrations that had not even been contemplated by the external PLO.

Arafat had to learn the language of the inside leaders in order to take credit for their innovations. When he tried to impose his operational concepts on the uprising, he was met more than once with refusal, as happened with his plan for the creation of a Popular Army in the villages, to be headed by the commander of Force 17, Abu Tayeb.

The *intifadah* also forced the PLO to change its political platform. The resolutions of the Algiers PNC and Arafat's subsequent statements of moderation largely stemmed from the uprising leadership's demand that the *intifadah*'s military and propaganda gains be translated into tangible political gains, in the form of progress toward termination of the occupation and a settlement with Israel. In a closed door speech at the Algiers PNC, Abu Iyad described the PNC resolutions as a "gift" to the *intifadah*, an investment of its profits.

Arafat and his associates are clearly disturbed

that the *intifadah* may lead to the emergence of a local leadership intent upon playing a more independent role and "escaping forward" toward accommodation. They realize that Palestinians in the territories increasingly desire arrangements that will reduce their suffering and that they are prepared to accept partial steps to achieve this. When the local leadership drafted a plan (named the Hussein Plan, after its principal author, Faisal el-Husseini) in August 1988 for a unilateral declaration of an independent Palestinian state, they emphasized that the state's legislative assembly would be composed solely of leaders from the territories and that the government, though headed by Arafat, would consist mainly of ministers from the local leadership. The plan was intended to be a spectacular move on the part of the local leadership, but Arafat appropriated the idea of declaring independence while eliminating any role for the insiders in his formulation.

Relations between the inside leadership and the external PLO have often been strained and have even reached a state of mini-crisis on occasion. At the heart of these mini-crises lies the refusal of Arafat and his associates to grant the Unified Command the status of central authority in directing the uprising. For example, the Tunis-based PLO refuses to let the Unified Command distribute funds smuggled into the territories and discourages individuals associated with the Unified Command from contacting Israeli representatives or appearing too frequently in the media. Prior to the Algiers PNC, the PLO vetoed attempts by the Unified Command to use the uprising flyers to mobilize public sentiment in favor of a revision of the PLO's political program. And, of course, the PLO has strived to prevent contacts between the Unified Command and American diplomats, as occurred when Secretary of State George Shultz visited the region in February 1988. This policy was modified after the U.S.-PLO dialogue began in December 1988.

The external PLO has been aided in its

efforts to restrain the Unified Command by Israeli policies that have persisted in decapitating the uprising leadership, particularly members of the Unified Command and the upper echelons of the Popular Committees. By sending senior uprising leaders to detention camps or by deporting them, Israel paved the way for Arafat to re-impose his authority on the replacement uprising leaders, by means of what may be called "government by fax." The suppression of local *Shabiba* clubs and the closure of offices of other nationalist institutions in the territories also weakened the local leadership and increased its dependence on Tunis. Arafat saw to it that the local committees were directly tied to an external address as much as possible, instead of being permitted to coordinate their activities on their own. Not a single deported member of the Unified Command has been given a senior position in the PLO's hierarchy and the PLO has seen to it that the *intifadah* does not produce any outstanding hero, dead or alive, who might tarnish Chairman Arafat's halo. Even though the Unified Command has been able to affect the doctrine and tactics of the PLO dramatically, it has not been able to achieve full parity in decision-making. In the final analysis, the Unified Command has remained subordinate to Arafat and the PLO Executive Committee.

There is no discernible gap in positions between the inside leaders and the external PLO on the question of objectives: both aspire to an independent Palestinian state. One could even argue that the insiders might be less accommodating on the shape of a final settlement, since it would be harder for them to make concessions affecting the diaspora Palestinians in such crucial matters as the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees.

However, the uprising leadership does convey the impression that it is in a greater hurry to achieve immediate progress and is thus more pragmatic in its willingness to countenance an interim agreement. According to some indications, the insiders are willing to accept a modest

interim agreement so long as it does not compromise their ability to strive toward independence in subsequent negotiations. Most of the insiders have concluded that it will be difficult for the Palestinians to make additional gains on the ground and that there might actually be an erosion in their current position. For this reason, the uprising leaders have indicated to Tunis that an interim agreement providing for Palestinian autonomy should not be ruled out. Because the inside leadership is familiar with Israeli society – most members of the Unified Command possess a basic working knowledge of Hebrew – and fully aware of the needs of the population in the territories, there is greater appreciation in its ranks of the merits of accepting an interim arrangement.

The insiders have gained enormous self-confidence during the uprising and have learned to improve their operational methods. They are interested in improving their position by accepting an interim settlement that would protect them not only from persecution by the Israeli security services but also from the erosion of their authority by the external PLO. The local leaders believe that they can shape the institutions of autonomy so that it will lay the basis for future independence. At the same time they will assure themselves greater say in the PLO. They argue that the *intifadah* guarantees that an interim agreement will not become merely a fig leaf for continued Israeli occupation. Indeed, after 21 months of the *intifadah*, it is clear that autonomy will be far more meaningful than that envisaged in Camp David, even if the framework appears similar on the surface. A post-*intifadah* autonomy is bound to be vastly different from all pre-*intifadah* models, mainly because the uprising has changed the Palestinians, both in terms of their self-esteem and in the way they are perceived by others. The Palestinians are aware of the need to channel the violent eruptions of the *intifadah* into more manageable avenues. Trading an end of the *intifadah* for some political gain is not on their agenda. However, reshaping the *intifadah* is definitely one of their goals.

Elections: The Likely Outcome

General elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will yield an inevitable result: a landslide victory for the candidates endorsed either directly or indirectly by the PLO via the Unified Command. Neither the imposition of restrictions on campaigning, the extent of the franchise, who may run, nor the presence of large numbers of Israeli troops near the polls will alter this outcome.

The elections are destined to be a referendum with a predetermined outcome. For various reasons, both the outside and the inside PLO may turn the elections into a quasi-referendum by presenting a single slate of candidates. This is a familiar method in several Arab countries, known as *tazkiya*, in which the absence of opposition guarantees victory whether or not people vote. A desire to prevent tensions among the various PLO factions operating in the territories may lead the Palestinians to forgo a show of democracy in order to preserve the solidarity created by the *intifadah*.

In any case, the details of the PLO's election tactics are of only secondary importance. More important is the success of the Unified Command in imposing *intifadah* discipline on the Palestinian population. It is very likely that the Unified Command will be able to ensure electoral support for its preferred candidates and deter competition if it so decides. A leadership that can compel thousands of employees to resign and that can maintain an ongoing partial strike and weekly general strikes can certainly control the elections, even if there are forces working against it.

- Israel may be able to retain a measure of veto power over the identity of candidates, but it can no longer pick candidates and expect them to win. This was already apparent in 1976, when pro-PLO candidates triumphed in municipal elections over traditional candidates favored by Israel.

- Hamas will face a difficult choice: boycotting the elections altogether or attempting to disrupt them; fielding candidates to run against PLO candidates; or joining a PLO coalition list by allowing members of the "Islamic Trend" or sympathizers to run. An attempt by Hamas to boycott or disrupt elections would likely be resisted by the majority of Gaza residents, and by a greater majority of the West Bank residents. Unified Command candidates will win a clear cut victory if Hamas chooses a confrontational path; Hamas will achieve only isolated victories in Gaza, at the cost of being blamed for fracturing the unity of the Palestinian camp. It will therefore be preferable from Hamas' perspective to pursue a quiet boycott rather than a vigorous disruption campaign, or to become informally integrated by nominating Islamic candidates for the general list. A lesson should be derived from the fact that following the Algiers PNC and Arafat's Geneva statements, Hamas members did not enter into open confrontation with PLO supporters in the territories, despite their clear disapproval of these actions.

- Local elements allied with the rejectionist Palestinian National Salvation Front and Syria – including two small communist splinter groups – have no real following in the territories, and their propaganda against the Unified Command has not struck a responsive chord with the general population.

Even if the elections bring about a struggle among the various factions that comprise the inside PLO, they will serve to confirm and legitimize the local leadership that has gained strength during the *intifadah*. Whether Unified Command activists submit their own candidacies or set the tone from behind the scenes, the elections will endow them with Israeli and international recognition. The election of Unified Command-backed candidates will provide the local leadership with a degree of immunity from Israeli punitive measures and from external PLO pressure. The elections could be seen as a subtle

device to upgrade the *intifadah* leadership from pamphleteers to elected negotiators. This transformation will enable the local leadership to shift from clandestine political action toward more open activity and mass mobilization.

Such a change in status of the local leadership will no doubt place an array of still-anonymous faces in the limelight. Anyone interested in assessing what the likely electoral slate will look like — i.e., factional and generational splits and general political balance — can rely upon the Hussein Independence Document — seized by the Israelis in August 1988 — which included a list of 152 individuals intended to serve on the legislative council of a Palestinian state. That list reflects the view of PLO supporters as to how a coalition should be constituted. The list included, in addition to activists from the Unified Command and the Popular Committees, old guard leaders of the pro-PLO nationalist establishment, a handful of pro-Jordanians, leaders of Hamas, other relevant religious figures and, for the first time, women — 18 in total. The majority of those included on the list were Fatah supporters, but not necessarily all members of the hard core of the Fatah network in the territories. Fatah has traditionally attempted to form broad coalitions rather than rely solely upon its own devout cadres.

In preparing for elections, the Palestinians will probably try to draw up an electoral list similar to the one attached to the Hussein document. In this coalition, Fatah's associates from the Popular and Democratic Fronts, the Palestinian Communist Party and other factions will almost surely be over-represented, but a majority of the slots will be reserved for Arafat supporters. In addition, Fatah will likely ensure that its field activists and veteran local spokesmen are included, but the majority of the spots on the list will still go to professional, white collar figures and trade union leaders. In any event, most of those chosen for the list will probably be individuals who served time as detainees during the uprising.

Elections in the territories could help bring forth a leadership that is less doctrinaire, less factional and less linked to a clandestine tradition than would be the case if the list were simply composed of members of the Unified Command and Popular Committees. Elections are therefore a means to “dilute” the inside PLO-affiliated leadership and to broaden its base by bringing forward pro-PLO nationalist “independents” who have not necessarily played as active a role in the uprising as members of the Unified Command or Popular Committees. This elected leadership can expect to enjoy the confidence of large segments of the Palestinian public since it will not be perceived as merely a mirror of the uprising's hierarchy in the territories.

The younger generation — those between the ages of 30 and 40 — that leads the *intifadah* should be well represented in the elected leadership, but other more moderate and familiar personalities are also likely to be elected. Although this leadership may not be completely dominated by the local PLO factions, it is expected to remain attached to the external PLO. As a rule, the elected leadership is likely to avoid open disputes with the Tunis leadership, in order to maintain a unity of ranks, at least superficially, and will seek to persuade rather than to pressure Tunis. At the same time, this leadership may exhibit greater self-confidence in its dealings with the external PLO and will command greater respect from Tunis. In the course of the *intifadah*, the external PLO was able to steadily increase its control over the Unified Command. Elections will reverse this process.

It was demonstrated in the 1970s that an elected body of pro-PLO figures in the territories takes substantial liberties when dealing with the exile PLO leadership. The Palestinian mayors elected in 1976 went on to form the backbone of the pro-PLO National Guidance Committee that on more than one occasion refused to obey Arafat's directives. There is all the more

reason to believe that a post-*intifadah* elected leadership will demand a greater voice in PLO decision-making. Tension is bound to arise in the course of the interaction between the Palestinian Self-Governing Authority and the PLO exile leadership. Although Arafat will remain the uncontested leader, a new balance is likely to emerge in which his dependence on the external PLO decreases while the inside leadership acquires a greater say over the direction of PLO policy toward a step-by-step settlement process with Israel. By then, the inside leadership will control the administration, services, budgets and permits in the territories and its dependence on PLO financial aid will be greatly reduced. The inside leadership will also have its own "diplomatic" status, emanating from international recognition and it will retain the power to regulate violent manifestations of the *intifadah*. For even if there was a calm prior to and during the elections – as demanded by Israel – the option of re-initiating public disturbances will always be there.

Institutional Disengagement

The implementation of the election plan for the territories, however, faces serious obstacles. Even in the best circumstances it may be delayed for many months. From the outset, both Israel and the PLO insist on an insurance policy against a loss of control over the process, so that it does not boomerang. Israelis are concerned that without the installation of some necessary checks and balances, elections leading to autonomy will only speed up the establishment of a Palestinian state under PLO control. The Palestinians are concerned that elections and autonomy may only prolong Israel's occupation and postpone a final settlement. Israel is worried that the *intifadah* will get worse, while the PLO is afraid it will subside or be terminated. Israel wishes to bar Palestinians living outside the territories from playing a role in the process, while the PLO fights to secure itself a place. The difficulty lies in the fact that before an agreement can be reached on the modalities of

elections, a much more complicated formula must be worked out to link elections to the long-term settlement process. Since both parties hold widely divergent views of what interlock is needed, this will be a formidable task.

The question, therefore, is whether elections are the only immediate option for achieving progress toward an interim settlement of Palestinian self-rule. In the absence of agreement on a long-term, comprehensive political framework, does progress in the settlement process depend on elections?

It may be possible and desirable to launch a preliminary initiative, one that both improves the chances for an agreement on elections and creates an option to commence Palestinian self-government without elections, should such agreement prove impossible to reach.

Such a preliminary initiative should be based on three assumptions:

- Elections are not necessarily the only way to start a practical dialogue with the local Palestinian leadership. This leadership is now organized in different bodies — besides the illegal Popular Committees and Unified Command — that can easily be approached by Israel.
- The implementation of aspects of autonomy, up to a certain point, does not require a prior comprehensive agreement, but can be achieved gradually, not necessarily according to a predetermined plan.
- A change of regime in the territories does not require linking this process to the essential, though intractable, political questions relating to final status. On the contrary, if possible it is better to dispense with such linkage and instead restrict the initiative's scope initially to the micro level.

In other words, pending a political agreement, it is possible to move forward through ar-

rangements with the local Palestinian leadership for an **institutional disengagement**. A series of separate, focused institutional arrangements could be implemented which, when taken together, would constitute a substantial Israeli administrative withdrawal.

This process should not be perceived as a substitute for elections, or as an alternative route, but rather as an immediate step to reduce the acute pains and dangers of continued confrontation. Indications of further deterioration in the territories, with the threat of an escalation in violence yet to come, require immediate and meaningful attempts to change the course of events. While elections must remain the declared goal of diplomatic efforts, measures should be implemented on the ground, in tandem with these efforts. The advantages of elections are many, foremost among them their role in upgrading the local Palestinian leadership to a position of parity with the external PLO.

Yet elections also have a serious shortcoming: it may take too long to arrive at an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on holding them. In the meantime, there is a real risk that the *intifadah* will escalate with radicals in both camps pumping fuel onto the fire of confrontation. A preventive move is needed so that Palestinian extremists who seek further victories by using greater force do not hijack the leadership of the *intifadah*. An institutional disengagement will create incentives for both sides to refrain from escalation and to continue informal dialogue. Here, lessons learned from the process that occurred on Israel's southern front vis a vis Egypt should now be applied to Israel's eastern front.

At the end of the 1973 war, Egypt and Israel reached agreement on the disengagement of forces along the Suez Canal. This agreement marked the first step in a process that led to the 1975 Interim Agreement and subsequently to the 1979 peace treaty between the two countries. A similar move should be made in the West Bank

and Gaza. On the Egyptian front, two armies had to be separated, while in the territories there are two rival administrations that need to be separated. In Sinai, Israel withdrew from territory in order to disengage, despite the fact that its forces had encircled the Egyptian Third Army, because a resumption of the war was unacceptable to Israel. In a similar sense, there is a need for administrative withdrawal in the territories because the cost of destroying the Palestinian crude autonomy is too high. When the Sinai disengagement was executed, a final agreement had not been guaranteed and no assurances were given concerning any future settlement. The same should apply to the Palestinian front: the process should begin without a priori assurances of the ultimate outcome.

Since the early stages of the *intifadah*, members of the Unified Command and the Popular Committees have sought to disengage the Palestinian population from the Israeli authorities and to establish their own separate institutions to replace Israeli institutions. The destruction of the Civil Administration remains a primary objective of the uprising leadership. For its part, Israel has been fighting the Palestinians in an effort to maintain the very same Civil Administration that it is willing to give up in the context of an autonomy agreement. Instead of persevering in this effort, Israel can offer to cooperate with the Palestinians in facilitating the establishment of a legal parallel Palestinian administration by turning over various administrative responsibilities to the Palestinians and gradually dismantling the Civil Administration.

The PLO has long blessed efforts to create the nucleus of Palestinian self-government in the territories as a step toward actual sovereignty. For the moment, there is no conflict between the PLO's approach and Israel's willingness to turn over administrative responsibilities to the Palestinians as part of autonomy. In other words, the process of institutional disengagement can be seen by each side as it wishes: the PLO can present it as laying the basis for

independence, while Israel can view it as a step toward arriving at an interim agreement for a transitional period. As in Camp David, a significant dose of “creative ambiguity” will be required to allow each side to cling to its interpretation of administrative withdrawal. Nonetheless, an Israeli administrative withdrawal will have important consequences:

- A mechanism for meaningful dialogue with the local Palestinian leadership will be established, i.e., informal negotiations will take place despite the absence of a concrete political agenda in the dialogue.
- The creation of preliminary, experimental arrangements — albeit in narrow sectors and on a modest scale — will serve as the starting point for a more formal interim agreement.
- The administrative withdrawal will establish a regular coordinating system between Israel and the branches of the Palestinian administration.

The areas in which an Israeli administrative withdrawal can be effected are spelled out in detail in the autonomy model submitted by Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s government during the autonomy negotiations with Egypt in 1980, and later in Prime Minister Shimon Peres’ 1986 proposals for “Partial Devolution” of the Civil Administration’s authority in the territories. In fact, there is already a strong bipartisan consensus in Israel — at least on paper — concerning many areas of responsibility that can be turned over to the Palestinians. Prime Minister Shamir has recently reiterated the distinction between controlling an area militarily and controlling the life of its residents.

The Unified Command and its circle of supporters and affiliates would serve as the Palestinian partner in this process. But instead of being forced to deal directly with the Unified Command in its role as the coordinator of the *intifadah*, Israel would be able to reach the Uni-

fied Command through its other addresses: trade unions, white collar associations, student councils, various regional coordinating committees, chambers of commerce, industrial associations and so on. In fact, one can easily communicate with the leaders of the uprising while they wear their other, non-*intifadah* hats, since all of them belong not only to the clandestine networks but also to the public institutions named above. Anyone who negotiates with the leaders of the physicians’, lawyers’ or construction workers’ associations will find himself engaged in direct negotiations — or something very close — with those who guide the uprising. In other words, the administrative withdrawal option would spark a dialogue between Israel and precisely those figures who would be elected were elections to be held.

Another — perhaps preferable — option would be for Israel to turn a blind eye toward the formation of Higher Sectorial Councils under the guidance of the Unified Command. Such councils, to which Israel has objected vigorously in the past, can also serve as suitable interlocutors since they would be comprised of top activists who have both professional and political standing in their communities.

Administrative withdrawal would offer Palestinian leaders recognition at an early stage, as well as a growing share of power in the administration of the territories. This can be accomplished by inviting the aforementioned bodies to participate in discussions for institutional disengagement. The PLO would face a difficult dilemma if this came to pass. Palestinians in the territories would regard the PLO’s refusal to permit a dialogue and arrangements along these lines as evidence that the PLO is ignoring their needs, rejecting tangible gains and attempting to paralyze the local leadership. In any case, institutional disengagement should not be made contingent upon a Palestinian commitment to terminate the *intifadah* or on any political understanding. Thus the PLO would not be able to argue that its claim to serve as the sole represen-

tative of the Palestinians was being undermined.

For Israel, the process of reaching an informal agreement to transfer authority to the Palestinians may result in a reduced level of violence, though the opposite possibility should not be discounted. However, it is clear that decreasing the role of the Civil Administration will significantly reduce areas of friction with the Palestinian population. Regardless, the purpose of the initiative should not be to quell the *intifadah*, but rather to pave the way for elections and other moves toward an interim settlement.

The starting point for this dialogue could be the issues upon which Israel and Egypt reached nearly total agreement during the 1979-1981 autonomy talks. (Egypt kept the PLO fully informed during the autonomy talks and recently gave the PLO all its files relating to the talks.) The areas in which Israel, Egypt and the United States reached agreement – with the knowledge, though not the explicit endorsement of the PLO – included the less controversial elements of the list of powers and responsibilities of the autonomy institutions. The questions upon which agreement was not reached, such as responsibility for internal security, the redeployment of the IDF in the territories, control over water resources and state lands and the status of Jewish settlements could be discussed after elections have taken place or at a later stage in the institutional disengagement.

To maximize both sides' involvement and commitment to the process, it will be necessary to conduct the negotiations on a broad front, with as many Palestinian bodies as possible from all social strata. It will be necessary to discuss not only the arrangements of the administrative withdrawal, but also a series of new arrangements in other matters.

For example, most Israelis recognize the injustice done to tens of thousands of Palestinians employed in Israel. These workers do not receive the full social benefits that their Israeli

co-workers receive, despite the fact that they pay a portion of their wages into a special social benefits program. Israel could offer the leaders of the three Palestinian trade union federations negotiations with government representatives, employers, treasury officials and the Histadrut to arrange an equitable new system for distributing the revenue received from these deductions. The total amount in question is at least 10 to 20 million dollars a year and could be used to develop an autonomous Palestinian social security system.

Another example has to do with Israeli treatment of the Palestinian press. The leadership of the Palestinian Journalists' Association and editors of newspapers from the territories could be invited to negotiate with the authorities in order to end the severe censorship to which the Palestinian press is subjected. In other words, the censor and Palestinian editors and journalists could create a relationship that resembles the relationship between the Israeli press and the censor, namely, a minimal military censorship based upon a gentleman's agreement that would include a joint board of appeal. Israel has learned that heavy-handed censorship served only to further the emergence of an alternative Palestinian press in the form of leaflets, clandestine brochures and graffiti.

Many other sectors could be addressed in discussions between Israel and the Palestinians. These talks would correct administrative inequities while negotiations are conducted over the transfer of the Civil Administration's authority, responsibility and funds.

- The heads of the institutions of higher education in the territories and later, the leaders of the student councils, could be called upon to negotiate with the Israelis to re-open the universities after nearly two years of closure. Teachers' associations, the Higher Education Council and similar bodies could eventually negotiate the transfer of control of the school system in the territories.

- Representatives of charitable institutions could be invited to discuss the rescinding of Israeli closure and banning orders which were issued because of the role these organizations played in transferring funds to finance the *intifadah*.

- A serious discussion could take place with the heads of the local chambers of commerce regarding their complaints about excessive Israeli taxation, particularly the value added tax.

- The trade unions, which have provided the uprising with many of its key activists, could become partners in transferring the authority of the Civil Administration officer in charge of labor and social services, whose responsibilities include overseeing employment bureaus, vocational programs and welfare activities. The heads of the trade unions and representatives of women's organizations and charitable associations would be able to form an interim team to replace the Israeli administration in this sector.

- The Higher Health Council, which was established during the *intifadah* by the heads of the physicians' and pharmacists' associations, could negotiate the transfer of authority over the health care system in the territories, including government-run hospitals and clinics.

Similar steps can be taken in other areas such as agriculture, justice, housing, transportation and industry. Consultations could also start to appoint rural and municipal councils to replace those that were paralyzed or pressured into resigning during the *intifadah*. The presence of an active municipal system acceptable to the local population would strengthen self-government.

This approach, if carefully and speedily executed, may result in constructing partial autonomy piece-by-piece and not according to a predetermined agreement. The easier domains could be addressed first so that de facto Palestin-

ian self-rule in some sectors would precede a formal agreement. Thus, the Palestinians would be offered immediate concrete gains—control over budgets, civil apparatus and vital services—without a political quid pro quo. In return, Israel will achieve some degree of coordination with local Palestinian institutions that may also impact the uprising's daily level of violence. Palestinians will be deterred from "running away" with autonomy because of their continued dependence on Israeli cooperation and because of the Israeli military presence. Some degree of cooperation will be inevitable because of Palestinian and Israeli interdependence. Still, by dismantling its Civil Administration, Israel will be giving up the use of numerous punitive and retaliatory sanctions previously employed.

The implementation of administrative withdrawal may result in increased aid to the Palestinians from the United States and other western countries. Indeed, it is likely to result in the United States deciding to channel its aid directly to Palestinian institutions, instead of disbursing aid funds to the Palestinians through Jordan or Israel. Furthermore, it is possible that Arab funds currently transferred directly to the PLO would be channeled to specific projects initiated and controlled by the Palestinians in the territories.

The process of administrative withdrawal could test the intentions of both sides. Israel's sincerity will be demonstrated by its performance in implementing administrative withdrawal, thinning out redeployed military forces in the territories and lifting restrictions on inside pro-PLO activists. The *intifadah* leadership will be asked to make a clear choice either to seek a settlement in agreement and cooperation with Israel or to continue trying to impose a solution on Israel. The external PLO will be required to recognize the insiders' central role in this phase of the peace process, and to overcome its mistrust and suspicions of them. In short, the PLO will be called upon to accept the fact that Palestinian institution building in cooperation with Israel will precede any other steps in the peace

process, and that questions such as the "right of return" will only be addressed much later in the process.

Finally, one comes to the U.S. role. Since 1973, the United States has sponsored a series of formal agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors, e.g., the disengagement agreements that followed the 1973 war, the Camp David Accords and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and the stillborn May 17th agreement between Israel and Lebanon. In this case, the United States will have to play a slightly different role, by facilitating an informal process of peace-making, which will start at the lower levels of practical on-the-ground arrangements and gradually gather momentum toward a contractual peace agreement. The United States will have to elicit not only the active support of the Soviet Union for this process, but also to ensure moderate Arab backing and the external PLO's consent.

While maintaining its efforts to bring about comprehensive peace talks, the United States has an opportunity to encourage a process that will change the grim realities on the ground.

*Ehud Yaari, the Arab affairs correspondent for Israel Television, wrote this article while a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute. It is based on research conducted over the past 21 months for Mr. Yaari's forthcoming book on the intifadah, **The Third Front: The Palestinian Uprising and Israel's Dilemma** (Simon & Schuster), co-authored with Ze'ev Schiff. The author would like to thank Jeremy Benjamin for his assistance in preparing this publication.*

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