

A Vision for the Transformation of the Middle East

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After more than two decades of continued negotiations and mediation, the Middle East peace process seems to have reached a dead-end. International enthusiasm and support for it have subsided, and Arab normalization of relations with Israel, which began after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, is now on the retreat. American mediation, which tried to save the process more than once before, seems to have run out of ideas. In fact, American involvement in the peace process has limited itself to conflict management, not conflict resolution; it has therefore failed to achieve either political stability or peace. Meanwhile, people on both sides of the conflict seem to have lost hope of living in peace and consequently are getting used to living in a state of permanent war and increasing violence and despair.

Numerous factors have contributed to the collapse of the peace process. However, no factor is as important as the clashing views and perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians regarding the land of Palestine. Israeli Jews in general view the confiscation of Arab land and the continued expansion of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a security issue, and a condition for guaranteeing Israel's long term survival. Some Israeli Jews, moreover, believe that they have a Biblical right to the entire land of Palestine, and thus claim that policies to ethnically cleanse Palestine of its Arab rightful owners are justified. On the other hand, Palestinian Arabs view Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories as detrimental to their survival and hopes for having a national homeland and an independent state. Moreover, Palestinians in general believe that they have a historic right to the entire land of Palestine because they are the people who inhabited that land from the dawn of history until Zionist Jews began to arrive in large numbers from Europe and elsewhere in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Due to such attitudes and claims and counterclaims, a compromise solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been hard to conceive, let alone negotiate and implement. Since most issues involved in this conflict are value-related and not interest-related, the conflict is less amenable to political compromise.

The Middle East peace process, as a result, needs a new approach to revive it; a new visionary plan to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable Israeli-Palestinian historic and political claims. Such a vision would place all contentious issues in a totally different perspective that has the potential of transforming the perceptions of both sides and creating new states of mind more amenable to compromise and peaceful coexistence. The process also needs a firm, foresighted American leadership and a strong commitment by the US government to help transform the political and economic landscape of the entire Middle East region, putting an end to violence and despair and planting the seeds of peace, hope and progress.

The history of the Arab-Israeli conflict strongly suggests that the restoration of Palestinian national rights, which dictates an Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and non-Palestinian territories Israel occupied in 1967 on the one hand, and an Arab recognition of Israel's political reality and security needs on the other, are the two major conditions for an Arab-Israeli settlement. Without the fulfillment of these two conditions, no peace treaty would be comprehensive or lasting. In addition, without a practical framework for genuine economic cooperation and regional security arrangements and an arms control regime, all settlements, regardless of their nature and intentions, would fall short of making peace both a state of mind and a state of political and economic affairs that are mutually reinforcing and self-perpetuating.

The proposed settlement outlined in this paper represents a comprehensive approach to settling all contentious issues related to the Arab-Israeli dispute. It envisions the conclusion of three different sets of arrangements between Israel and its Palestinian and Arab adversaries, with each set having three components: a political component, an economic component, and a security component.

1. An Israeli-Palestinian arrangement to settle the historical and moral claims of both parties to the land, and satisfy the national political aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians alike.
2. An Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian arrangement to address issues related to security, national sovereignty, shared resources, and economic cooperation.
3. An Arab-Israeli arrangement to settle other political, security and territorial issues; namely the Israeli-Syrian and the Israeli-Lebanese disputes, and to provide a framework for regional cooperation and the establishment of a Middle East Economic Community.

In addition to the above, the proposed settlement calls for the initiation of a regional security conference to deal with issues related to the arms race, border disputes, rights of minorities, terrorism, and the management of the region's scarce water resources.

Political and security arrangements that are meant to endure must be realistic and ought to be perceived by all concerned parties as fair and mutually beneficial. They must also strive to serve an enlightened common interest. As such, the arrangements must be guided by certain principles that echo international consensus, are in line with accepted rules of international law, and reflect the spirit of the time. The following principles and objectives will guide the proposed settlement:

1. Palestinians and Israelis should enjoy equal national rights and opportunities;
2. Putting an end to Israeli occupation of Arab land that resulted from the 1967 war;
3. All states in the region are entitled to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders free from violence and the threat of war and intimidation;
4. The proposed settlement should be comprehensive and capable of guaranteeing the security of Israel and the realization of Palestinian national rights and the restoration of Syrian and Jordanian and Lebanese sovereignty over territories occupied by Israel;
5. Israeli recognition that its presence in the West Bank and Gaza makes it a foreign occupying power and acceptance of responsibility under the provisions of the Geneva Convention;
6. Israeli acceptance of responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinian people and thus the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem;
7. Using international law, relevant UN resolutions, and human rights principles as a frame of reference to devise a solution to the Palestinian refugees' problem; and
8. A plan to promote regional development and economic cooperation.

The proposal, to be outlined in more detail, provides all parties to the conflict with the means and opportunities to achieve their principal political objectives and security needs. It asks each party to concentrate on the basic things that it needs to feel secure and live in peace, and to overlook the things it wishes to deny the other party from getting.

As for the Israelis, the plan provides for:

- A. An Arab recognition of the state of Israel and an acknowledgment of its need to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders;

B. Security guaranteed by a peace treaty and maintained, if deemed necessary, through the stationing of an international force of observers along shared borders with Palestinian and other neighboring Arab states;

C. The right to define themselves as they wish and to implement their “law of return” in their own state without outside interference; and

D. Access to living in other parts of Palestine which constitute the state of Palestine.

As for the Palestinians, the plan provides for:

A. The right to have a state of their own on the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders;

B. The right to define themselves as the wish and to implement the Palestinian “right of return” in their own state without outside interference;

C. A comprehensive solution to the Palestinian refugee problem; and

D. Access to living in other parts of Palestine which constitute the state of Israel.

As for Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, the plan provides for restoration of national sovereignty over the occupied Syrian, Jordanian and Lebanese territories. In addition, it provides for the people of Israel and the peoples of neighboring Arab states equal opportunities to live in peace and to develop as equal partners in one economic community. While all peoples should have the right to define themselves as they wish, they should not have the right to wall themselves off or be allowed to discriminate against the other in the name of racial purity or religious teachings.

Israeli-Palestinian Arrangement

According to this set of arrangements, pre-1948 Palestine would be designated as one geographical entity or a "shared homeland" for all Israelis and Palestinians to live in and enjoy. The shared Israeli-Palestinian homeland would host two separate states living side by side but two unified peoples living together. Israelis' expression of political choice, however, would take place within the borders of their own state only, while the expression of economic choice and residential preference would be extended to include the territories of the Palestinian state. Likewise, Palestinians' expression of political choice would take place within the borders of their Palestinian State, while the expression of economic choice and residential preference would be extended to include the territories of the Israeli State.

In other words, Israelis would acquire the right to live and work in the Palestinian State while having no rights to participate in Palestinian national politics; Palestinians would acquire a similar right to live and work in Israel but without having any rights to participate in Israeli national politics. Israelis as well as Palestinians would continue to be citizens of their own nation states regardless of their place of residence. Israelis who might choose to live in the Palestinian State would enjoy equal rights as other citizens of the Palestinian State, with the exception of political rights. Palestinians who might choose to live in the state of Israel would also enjoy equal rights as other Israeli citizens, with the exception of political rights.

It is well known, however, that neither Palestinians nor Israelis would accept the permanent settlement of large numbers of the other people in their own state. At the same time, it is also difficult to convince most Palestinians and Israelis to concede to the other what they consider as their right to live anywhere in what was Palestine prior to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. In addition, it would be unthinkable to expect the Palestinian refugees to surrender forever rights to the land Israel occupied and annexed in 1948-49, and forget the homes and towns and farms they were forced to leave behind; homes and farms they lived in and owned for countless generations. Therefore, the numbers of Palestinians and Israelis that would be allowed to live in the others' state could be limited to a certain percentage of the total population of that state, thus enabling each state to preserve its national character at all times.

Partitioning Palestine into two separate states and, at the same time, uniting its territories into one homeland is probably the only feasible solution to address the national rights, homeland aspirations, and historical claims to the land by both Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, applying the 'shared homeland' model to solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem would, in the long run, make national borders less relevant and remove all impediments to trade and travel and human mobility, making interaction between the land, its history, its cultures, and all peoples living on it a living reality. While the adoption of this concept is vital to the success of the whole peace plan, the implementation of certain provisions should proceed gradually in order to diminish fear and facilitate mutual trust and confidence building.

Jerusalem: As a part of this arrangement, the city of Jerusalem would remain unified and would serve as the capital of both states. The borders of the city would be restored to the pre-1967 lines in order to establish political and legal jurisdictions. Israeli and Palestinian claims of national sovereignty over the city would be restored to the same pre-1967 partition lines. Sovereignty, however, would be limited in substance because the plan calls for the city to

remain unified and to form its own representative government to manage all nonpolitical city affairs. According to this arrangement, Palestinians residing in Jerusalem would vote in Palestinian national elections, and Israelis residing in Jerusalem would vote in Israeli national elections, while both Palestinians and Israelis residing in Jerusalem would vote in the city's municipal elections. As such, the Holy City of Jerusalem would become a symbol of unity of purpose and a true expression of a shared homeland by two different peoples, thus making peaceful coexistence and human and cultural interaction a living experience.

In this context, sensitive issues such as security and the "right of return" and the dismantling of Jewish settlements will become more pragmatic and less ideological. When Palestinian demands for a state are fulfilled, and the Palestinian refugee problem is resolved, and Israel's political reality is recognized and respected by Arab states, Palestinian claims on Israeli territory will cease to exist. And when Israelis withdraw their military forces from the occupied territories and recognize the Palestinians' political rights, including the right to have a state of their own, Israeli claims on portions of the West Bank or Gaza will also cease to exist. Joining both states together in a shared homeland should make the "right of return" to Arabs and Jews alike a feasible goal to be achieved through peaceful means. In certain cases, it may even become a mutually beneficial act dictated by economic and social imperatives.

For example, an Israeli physician from Haifa whose expertise is more needed in Gaza might opt for settling there rather than commuting daily between his or her work and place of residence. Likewise, a Palestinian computer scientist from Jericho whose expertise is better rewarded in Tel Aviv might opt for settling there rather than endure a daily commute. After losing their jobs, resigning or retiring, both scientists are more likely to move back to live within the borders of their own states where most of their family members and friends live. This continuous movement of people and ideas and knowledge would create a dynamic situation, forcing perceptions on both sides to be transformed and new realities to be created that reinforce the advantages of peaceful coexistence and socioeconomic interaction.

Meanwhile, the presence of a fairly large number of Palestinians as residents of the Israeli state, and the presence of a similar large number of Israelis as residence of the Palestinian state would facilitate human and cultural interaction between the two peoples while dictating economic, political and security coordination between the two states. As such, it would make a surprise military attack by either state rather impossible to initiate because its citizens who would be residing in the other state would be as much at risk as the citizens of the

other state. Therefore, the designation of pre-1948 Palestine as a shared Palestinian-Israeli homeland would facilitate economic and political cooperation, prevent war, and help both peoples fulfill their national, historical and religious dreams.

Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian Arrangement

This set of arrangements will address security and economic and political issues related to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied Palestinian and Jordanian territories, and the formation of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. To facilitate this matter, this arrangement will contain three subsets of arrangements:

1. A Palestinian-Jordanian arrangement;
2. A Jordanian-Israeli arrangement; and
3. A Jordanian-Israeli-Palestinian arrangement (JIP).

According to the first subset, the states of Palestine and Jordan would form a confederation having one army, one currency and joint councils to coordinate political and economic and monetary policies and legislative matters. In addition, due to the special relationship and family ties that bind Palestinians and Jordanians together, the territories of the two states would be combined to form one Jordanian-Palestinian homeland. However, the expression of individual political choice for Palestinians and Jordanians alike would take place within the borders of their respective states only. This means that Palestinians and Jordanians would continue to be citizens of their own states regardless of their place of residence, and would therefore refrain from participating in the political affairs of the others' state. In addition, this arrangement would designate the existing Jordanian army as the army of the confederation, and thus spare the Palestinian State the need to have an army of its own; the army, however, would give Palestinians equal opportunity to join its ranks. The formation of a police force and a national guard should satisfy the security needs of a Palestinian state at peace with all its neighbors. As such, this arrangement would render the Palestinian state demilitarized. As for the second subset, it calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Jordanian territories and the restoration of Jordanian sovereignty over those territories, which the May 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty has largely accomplished.

According to the third subset, the Jordanian army would continue to be stationed east of the Jordan River and would not cross to the other side without the approval of the designated JIP body. Though Israeli military forces would be required to withdraw from the entire territories of the West Bank and Gaza, this arrangement would, in effect, retain current Israeli security lines without change. The West Bank, as a result, would become a buffer zone separating the military forces of Israel and the Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. To foster Israel's sense of security, the Israeli-Egyptian border arrangements could be duplicated if necessary, and international observers could be stationed along the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Jordanian borders. Moreover, the notion of creating demilitarized security zones could be introduced to address special Israeli and Palestinian fears concerning the security of certain areas and heavily populated centers.

In addition, two other arrangements would be established by the JIP states to address regional security and economic issues. The first would be a security regime to regulate movement of armies, coordinate efforts to combat terrorism on all sides, and address the need to reduce military spending by all parties. The second would be an economic union to address issues related to trade, labor, water, investment and transportation, and would plan for the establishment of a Benelux-type economic union among the three states.

Reducing military spending would foster peace and security and save valuable resources needed to revitalize the states struggling economies and create conditions conducive to economic cooperation and development. It might be worth noting that in the post-World War II era the two nations with the most impressive economic performance were Germany and Japan; both nations have avoided the arms race, limiting their defense spending to 3 percent and 1 percent of their GNPs respectively.

The Palestinian concept of state and confederation as outlined in this proposal would alleviate Israeli security concerns further. As a nation-state, Palestine would have to abide by international law and international treaties. And for their state to be accepted as legitimate, Palestinians would have to respect the existing political order and duly recognized international borders. Otherwise, their security would be threatened; and the legitimacy of their state would be jeopardized. Security concerns are basically a reflection of a particular state of mind and a certain state of political affairs. A national feeling of insecurity usually emanates from a common perception that neighbors are not to be trusted because they have territorial claims and/or hegemonic ambitions and the military might to back them up. But when mutual

recognition of national borders is achieved and legitimized, and mutual reduction in military spending becomes a reality, security concerns will be diminished. “That is the point,” wrote Flora Lewis in the *New York Times*, on March 6, 1990. “Israel’s security is at stake as long as Israel has no peace.”

Arab-Israeli Arrangement

This arrangement would address political and security issues with other Arab states, namely Syria and Lebanon. In addition, it will articulate a framework and define a suitable mechanism to create a Middle East economic community. To facilitate this endeavor, the arrangements contain three subsets:

- A. An Israeli-Syrian arrangement;
- B. An Israeli-Lebanese arrangement; and
- C. An overall regional economic and political and security arrangement.

According to the **first** subset, Israeli forces would be withdrawn from the occupied Golan Heights, and Syrian sovereignty over those territories would be restored. However, Syria would agree not to reposition its military forces in areas vacated by Israel; thus leaving current Israeli security lines unchanged. As a consequence, Syrian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 would become a buffer zone separating the armed forces of Israel and Syria from each other. Borrowing from the Israeli-Egyptian security arrangements, which have proven workable, a multinational force of observers would be stationed along the Israeli-Syrian border to monitor military movements and guarantee implementation of agreed upon arrangements.

The **second** subset calls for Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanese territories still occupied by Israel, namely the Shaba'a Farms, and for mutual recognition of international borders and Israeli respect for Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. This set of arrangements also calls for keeping the multinational force stationed in Southern Lebanon to monitor the situation and foster both sides' sense of security. Other regional and security arrangements envisioned in this proposal should provide the Lebanese government with added means to restore authority and strengthen national sovereignty, while denying Lebanese militias domestic legitimacy and outside support to disrupt peace.

The **third** subset contains two agreements:

1. An economic agreement to create a Middle East Economic Community, MEEC, whose initial members would be the states of Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria; and
2. A peace treaty calling for mutual recognition and normalization of relations among all MEEC member states.

The formation of MEEC would serve as a vehicle to facilitate regional economic cooperation, enlarge the potential export markets of all states, consolidate a rich but fragmented economic base, and lead ultimately to economic integration and the creation of one common market in the Middle East Region. As such, MEEC would in due time remove all restrictions on the movement of people, trade and capital and thus extend the economic choice for all individuals and business concerns belonging to the community to the outer borders of all member states. The solid technological and scientific base of Israel, the rich energy resources of Iraq, the well-trained manpower of Palestine and Jordan, the fertile land and abundant labor of Egypt and Syria, as well as the seasoned entrepreneurs of Lebanon, Palestine and Israel should provide the new economic community with the human, natural and knowledge resources needed to grow and prosper, fostering peace and security, and meeting peoples' economic expectations.

Being an export-oriented economy, Israel would be a primary beneficiary of the proposed economic arrangements. In fact, Israeli exports to the Palestinian state alone could increase by more than 50 percent a year for many years; Palestinians have a need to provide for a large and fast growing population, and for rebuilding their devastated infrastructure, health system and educational institutions, and economy. Financial resources provided by foreign governments and international organizations interested in Middle East peace and development would help all states attain higher economic growth rates. The Israeli and Palestinian economies in particular could attain growth rates in the range of 8-12 percent a year for many years to come.

MEEC should transform the Middle East economic and sociocultural landscape, creating millions of jobs and a common market of approximately 150 million people, while making regional cooperation a vehicle for enhanced security, political stability and economic prosperity. Human and economic and cultural interaction should, furthermore, lead to the evolution of more democratic attitudes and institutions in all member states, and thus free

creative minds to work for peace, not for war; for cooperation, not for enmity; for freedom, not for oppression; and for inclusion, not exclusion.

Several socioeconomic issues that are considered today formidable obstacles to reaching a political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict would be vastly reduced in size. The scarcity of water in the JIP states, for example, would become a less critical issue because the three major rivers in the Middle East - the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Tigris - would become part of the proposed economic community. In addition, the water-intensive agricultural products produced in the JIP states would become less competitive compared with Egyptian and Syrian products. JIP farmers, as a result, would be forced to produce other products utilizing less water. In fact, the well-trained and readily available human resources of the JIP states and the expansion of trade, transportation and communications in the region would drive the three economies to become more service-oriented and thus, reduce the overall demand for water.

The *Washington Post*, in a report on water scarcity in the Middle East, said on March 10, 1990, that “even if countries adopted long-range national policies, their mutual dependence on shared water sources requires far-reaching political cooperation.” In fact, ignoring this critical issue, which can never be adequately addressed except within a framework of regional cooperation, would amount to an invitation for continued hostilities and war. The formation of MEEC would, therefore, provide the required framework for coordinating national policies regarding water and reducing the water demand for agricultural purposes.

The resettlement of some 3.5 million Palestinian refugees, approximately half of them live in neighboring Arab states, would also become less threatening to Israel; the majority of Palestinians, having regained lost national identity and economic and political rights, would most likely choose to continue to live in countries where they have lived for the last six decades. Convenience, kinship, and familiarity with one’s social and economic environment would certainly become the primary considerations influencing decisions related to residency and future careers. While all Palestinian refugees would demand and be granted the right to return to the Palestinian and Israeli states, it is expected that no more than half a million would actually exercise that right and return to settle in either state, provided that Arab states hosting Palestinian refugees do not force them to leave. As a part of this arrangement, Arab states where Palestinian refugees have lived since 1948, namely Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, would agree to give such refugees the right to choose where they would like to live in exchange for

generous financial compensation provided by the international community. Meanwhile, Israel's lingering security concerns would be further eased as all of its Arab adversaries, including Syria and Iraq, become signatories to the peace treaty and partners in the economic community.

As part of a negotiated settlement, Israel, for security and other political considerations, might ask that some of its forces continue to be stationed in the occupied Arab territories for some years to come. The proposed settlement does not accept such a request because the stationing of Israeli forces in the Arab heartland would not enhance Israel's security. On the contrary, it would provoke Arab resentment and present Arab radicals with an easy target, thus undermining peace and compounding Israel's sense of insecurity. Being surrounded by Arab masses and/or confronted by well-equipped Arab armies, Israeli forces stationed in the Arab heartland would lack the muscle to protect Israel's security in times of war and ensure their own safety in times of peace. As a result, they would damage prospects for speedy confidence building, delay implementation of certain components of the settlement, and make genuine Arab-Israeli cooperation more difficult to accomplish and less appealing to contemplate.

In addition to the above provisions, and for such arrangements to produce a durable peace and true cooperation, the settlement should also include the following:

1. The signing of all documents to create the three main bodies - the Palestinian state, the JIP and MEEC - simultaneously;
2. Total and prompt Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories which Israel occupied during the 1967 war.
3. Implementation of the plan in its entirety within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed two years, in order to keep the peace momentum going and meet people's expectations;
4. Implementation should proceed hand-in-hand with normalization of relations among all states; a gradual, yet substantial reduction in military budgets; and compensation and resettlement of Palestinian refugees in countries of their own choice, including Israel, with their legitimate rights fully restored and respected;
5. Establishment of an international development fund whose task would be: **a.** to compensate Palestinian refugees for their suffering and lost property and finance their rehabilitation and resettlement; **b.** to provide the initial funds needed to create the main institutions of the political and economic bodies envisioned in the plan, and **c.** to

facilitate cooperative efforts and joint ventures in the economic, scientific, educational and cultural fields; and

6. Initiation of a regional conference along the lines of the European Conference on Security and cooperation (CSCE) to be called the Middle East Conference on Security and Cooperation (MECSC). This conference would be convened to endorse the arrangements described above, and to coordinate all efforts to deal with the region's other lingering and emerging problems such as terrorism. Members of MECSC would include the seven founding members of MEEC, all other Arab states, and Turkey, Cyprus, Iran Eritrea and Ethiopia. The functions of this conference, which is envisioned as a permanent regional institution, would focus primarily on efforts to develop and share the region's water resources, settle border disputes among its member states through political means, end the arms race and reduce military spending, and address questions related to the rights of minorities and ethnic groups in the region. Each member state would also be asked to declare a commitment to honor human rights within its own borders, respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of all other states, and resolve disputes and conflicts through diplomatic means.

How to Get from Here to There

Each time a feasible peace plan to resolve conflict is presented, the question of "how to get from here to there" becomes not only legitimate but pressing as well. The raising of this question, however, usually implies that the "here" and the "there" are known and recognized points by all parties as the first and final stations on the road to peace. But when the final outcome of a proposed settlement is not defined in clear terms, the "there" becomes a station that neither known nor agreed upon by the concerned parties, particularly the party most eager to conclude and finalize a comprehensive settlement. In such a case, the question of "how to get from here to there" becomes, in reality, a question of "how to get from here to nowhere." As the history of US mediation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has demonstrated, efforts to start a serious peace process without defining its final destination or ultimate outcome are destined to fail and, in the process, to confuse issues, deepen mutual suspicion and mistrust, and thus complicate matters further and increase frustration and despair. This does not mean, however, that interim stations on the road to a final peace settlement could not be identified and adopted

successfully. Defining the final outcome, nevertheless, remains the most important step to be undertaken at the outset of any peace process. Each peace plan should therefore strive to define the desired outcome before choosing a mechanism to conduct negotiations or a process to reach a settlement. In fact, the scope and nature of the desired outcome tend to determine the type of the mechanism to be employed because ends usually dictate the nature of means.

Yet, to move the proposed plan from its current visionary stage to a practical one through a constructive peace process, conflicting parties must first accept it and make a binding commitment to negotiate on its premises. Such a commitment could only come after the plan is officially presented to them by a third party that enjoys their respect and commands significant moral and/or political power; the only party that has such a power today as far as the Arab-Israeli conflict is concerned is the United States of America. In fact, neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians have ever articulated a peace plan of their own, or made a serious offer to the other for a comprehensive political settlement, despite Israeli claims to the contrary. Moreover, the two parties have demonstrated time and again their inability to negotiate an end to hostilities and make peace. And with the current weak political leadership on both sides, and due to political fragmentation and ideological infighting within each camp, hopes that Israelis and Palestinians could somehow negotiate a mutually acceptable political settlement by themselves are misguided at best.

Consequently, articulating a comprehensive political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict has become the responsibility of the President of the United States, and no one else; he must take the lead and articulate his vision in the form of an official declaration committing US prestige and resources to achieving peace, ending conflict, and helping transform the Middle East. A settlement proposed by the United States and backed by the international community, including the United Nations, is the only feasible way to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such an approach would give leaders of all conflicting parties a good and legitimate excuse to accept the proposed settlement and abide by its provisions, and rightly claim that it represents the will of the international community.

Once the proposal has been accepted by all concerned parties, other governments and international bodies that possess relevant expertise and influence would be asked to endorse it and help devise appropriate mechanisms to negotiate and conclude proposed arrangements. For example, Egypt and the United States could be asked to lend their expertise to set up the multinational forces envisioned in the plan, while the UN assumes the responsibility for

drafting a peace treaty to be signed by Israel and its Arab neighbors. Meanwhile, the European Union would be asked to develop a plan for the formation of an effective and mutually beneficial Middle East Economic Community. If such an approach is followed, negotiations would be completed within months, international involvement would be guaranteed, and the conflicting parties would be negotiating not the principles of an agreement, or even an outcome to a long and exhausting process, but minor details and phases of implementation.

An approach based on the notion of step-by-step diplomacy cannot work; it has in fact never worked anywhere or at anytime in history. On the other hand, emphasizing what is called "confidence building measures" is a good recipe for failure, not success; trying to implement certain steps before a detailed outline for a comprehensive settlement is articulated and accepted by the principal conflicting parties, would only lead to creating new facts on the ground that complicate rather than facilitate mutual confidence and peacemaking. The building of most Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, for example, had come while confidence building measures were supposedly being implemented by Israel. To serve the cause of peace, measures to build mutual confidence should come as an integral part of the implementation process of an agreed upon settlement, not while negotiations are in progress.

If a comprehensive settlement is achieved, Israel would become another Middle Eastern state living in peace with its neighbors, not an alien body rejected by all peoples that surround it. While Israel would most likely cease to be the only regional military power in the long run, it would most likely emerge as the most dominant technological and industrial power in the region. In contrast, if the peace process fails, a new large-scale war would be inevitable, and neither Israelis nor Arabs would emerge from it as winners. Nuclear and chemical weapons and long-range missiles have rendered a new Middle East war a senseless adventure with catastrophic consequences for all parties concerned.

The experience of Western Europe following the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957 has demonstrated that economic integration is the safest and most effective way to end age-old enmities and prevent the recurrent outbreak of hostilities. It made political coordination a prerequisite for effective economic cooperation, while making economic integration the first sure step toward regional stability and political cooperation. Due to the many far reaching developments of the post-Cold War era, our world has witnessed the fragmentation of several countries into smaller political entities, and the consolidation of many more into larger economic communities. While political fragmentation has become a tool to

free oppressed peoples and preserve the cultural heritage of some minorities and to restore national identity to others, economic consolidation has become an indispensable framework for economic development, regional cooperation, economic competitiveness and political stability.

Recent history seems also to suggest that political issues tend to greatly influence economic issues in times of uncertainties and regional conflicts. Yet in times of peace and regional stability, economic issues gain the upper hand and tend to determine the direction of politics. While the settling of political conflicts usually opens the door for regional cooperation, economic cooperation provides the rationale and practical framework for political coordination. Working together, they represent the most effective means to putting an end to regional conflicts while preserving states' national independence, and providing a solid foundation for the establishment of durable peace and security and prosperity.

The Arab-Israeli conflict will have to be settled through a formula capable of addressing the political aspirations and security concerns of both Israelis and Palestinians while meeting the economic and security needs of all states and peoples in the region. Referring to the Arab-Israeli conflict, former Secretary of State George Schultz said years ago, "A vision is needed that transcends the boundaries of traditional nation-states and addresses the clear requirements for the parties' security, political voice, economic opportunity and community life on an equal basis."

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