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UNDERSTANDING THE VIABILITY OF THE ARAB PEACE
INITIATIVE

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grateful.**

Text of The Arab Peace Initiative

The Council of the League of Arab States at the Summit Level, at its 14th Ordinary Session,

· **Reaffirms the resolution taken in June 1996 at the Cairo extraordinary Arab summit that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the strategic option of the Arab countries, to be achieved in accordance with international legality, and which would require a comparable commitment on the part of the Israeli government.**

· **Having listened to the statement made by his royal highness Prince Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz, the crown prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in which his highness presented his initiative, calling for full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the land for peace principle, and Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive peace with Israel.**

· **Emanating from the conviction of the Arab countries that a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace or provide security for the parties, the council:**

1. Requests Israel to reconsider its policies and declare that a just peace is its strategic option as well.
2. Further calls upon Israel to affirm:
 - a. Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of June 4, 1967 as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.
 - b. Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194.
 - c. The acceptance of the establishment of a Sovereign Independent Palestinian State on the Palestinian territories occupied since the 4th of June 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza strip, with east Jerusalem as its capital.
3. Consequently, the Arab countries affirm the following:
 - a. Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region.
 - b. Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.
4. Assures the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries.
5. Calls upon the government of Israel and all Israelis to accept this initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace and stop the further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab

Countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighborliness and provide future generations with security, stability, and prosperity.

6. Invites the international community and all countries and organizations to support this initiative.

7. Requests the chairman of the summit to form a special committee composed of some of its concerned member states and the secretary general of the League of Arab States to pursue the necessary contacts to gain support for this initiative at all levels, particularly from the United Nations, the security council, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the Muslim States and the European Union.

I. Introduction

“It’s easy to say that the situation is shaky now. Don’t rock the boat; the water is rising from the sea. This is a mistake because then the boat will drown. You need to adjust yourself to the water, to the sea.”--Gadi Baltiansky, Geneva Initiative-Israel Director

“We don't need more meetings, more photo-ops...What we need today is a serious process that will affect the lives of the people, that will give them hope that we are finally on the road towards ending this long-standing conflict.”--Former Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher

The international community has witnessed failed attempt after failed attempt to reach lasting solutions to the protracted Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts. Not only is there a lack of mutual trust between all relevant parties, but key elements in the United States appear to have lost hope in a near term resolution. In late 2015, the White House assessed that the possibility for a two-state solution is not feasible before President Obama leaves office. Broader academic and policy circles increasingly question the potentiality for an independent Palestinian state existing alongside an independent Jewish state. Indeed, it appears that the current status quo will continue serve as the modus operandi unless a major and unforeseen breakthrough occurs.

It is within this context the authors wish to explore the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative. The Arab Peace Initiative was launched by then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and adopted in 2002 by the Arab League in Beirut. Its release marked the first time in the history of the conflict that all members of the Arab League renounced military means as a way to achieve peace or to provide security. More significantly, this initiative effectively annulled the “Three Nos” of the 1967 Khartoum Resolution (no to recognition of, no to negotiation with, and no to peace with Israel), a position the Arab League had firmly-held for decades.

The Arab Peace Initiative calls for full Israeli withdrawal from “all Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 339,” a

“just and agreed upon” solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis, and Israeli acceptance of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.”¹ In exchange, Israel will receive “the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive peace” with all members of the Arab League in addition to security and economic guarantees.²

The Arab League has annually reaffirmed its commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative as a viable framework for negotiation. While some Israeli prime ministers have endorsed the idea of a multilateral regional negotiations track running parallel to a bilateral (Israeli-Palestinian) track, there has been no official Israeli response to the Arab Peace Initiative at the time of publication.

Given significant geopolitical developments since the Arab Peace Initiative’s release in 2002, this project analyzes whether the Arab Peace Initiative is considered to be a viable framework for negotiation according to elite opinions in the Middle East and the United States. By providing a comprehensive analysis on the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative, the authors hope to provide a comprehensive assessment to U.S. policymakers in the event that peace negotiations resume. It’s imperative that relevant parties know exactly what options remain on the table in order to adjust to the rising water and geopolitical developments that threaten the possibility for peace.

¹ “Official Translation of the full text of the Arab Peace Initiative.” *Agence France-Presse*. March 28, 2002.

² *Ibid.*

II. Defining Viability of Negotiation Frameworks

For the purpose of this paper, the authors will define the viability of negotiation frameworks according to Luke Baker, Jerusalem Bureau Chief of Reuters:

“At the very basic level, a negotiating framework has to have the trust from the other side. The mediator needs to be someone they can both trust, someone that doesn’t have skin in either side of the game. Everyone talks about having no preconditions, but unfortunately history is in fact a precondition. You have to have a *sense* that neither side is advantaged nor disadvantaged in any capacity--whether because of history, land, occupation, and even economic development. The framework needs to be open, [there needs to be] clarity of discussion, a trustworthy mediator, [equal] level of people sitting at the same table, and that it’s bilateral.”³

At the very root of any negotiation framework, the authors believe that the elements described in Mr. Baker’s definition must be present. In sections to follow, however, the authors will discuss exactly what conditions make the Arab Peace Initiative viable according to preexisting literature.

III. Research Methods

The authors extensively examined media sources and literature covering conflict resolution studies, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict, U.S. foreign policy, and regional Middle Eastern geopolitical dynamics. In addition to this body of literature, the authors conducted over 20 interviews during December 2015 through March 2016 in Israel, Jordan, and Washington, D.C.⁴

The authors chose to investigate the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative through the evaluation of one-on-one interviews with regional elites due to their influential and unique roles

³ Luke Baker Interview.

⁴ The authors acknowledge that Jordanian opinion might not represent all Arab opinion and tried their best to speak with other Arab voices in the region. However due to travel restrictions, it was challenging to conduct extensive interviews in other countries in the region. As a result, subsequent analysis that refers to Arab opinion encompasses Jordanian interviews and pre-existing literature on general Arab opinion.

in past and possibly future peace process negotiations. The authors spoke to journalists, academics, ambassadors, analysts, Members of Knesset, businesspeople, foreign policy advisors, former military officers, career intelligence officers, and grassroots activists. Furthermore, the authors actively sought to interview individuals representing a wide range of political opinions vis-a-vis the peace process to ensure that the analysis was comprehensive and unbiased. All participants were given the option to remain anonymous or confidential. These interviews proved to be invaluable to the authors' analysis.

The authors chose to primarily focus on elite from Israel and Jordan as both countries hold major stakes in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts. Furthermore, Jordan has played pivotal role in the formulation and promotion of the Arab Peace Initiative. Jordan continues to occupy a unique space as it holds a peace agreement with Israel and is a member of the Arab League. Jordan's role in past and potential future negotiations will be discussed further in later sections. While the authors acknowledge the country of Jordan does not represent the entire Arab world, the authors were able to interview perspectives within Jordan that represent wider viewpoints within the Arab world.

Finally, the authors want to highlight that the decision not to include the testimony of Palestinian elites within this project was intentional and not an oversight. The authors believe that while the bilateral track between the Israelis and Palestinians is absolutely essential to any regional or comprehensive framework, yet there has been little movement on the this track in recent history. While the authors maintain that peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians can only occur if both parties are at the negotiation table, the authors' focus is on the potentiality for the Arab (non-Palestinian) and Israeli track to incentivize movement on the bilateral track as a first step to a wider regional peace.

IV. Literature Review

This paper can be framed within the larger literatures on viability of negotiation frameworks, conflict resolution studies, the Israeli-Palestinian the conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and regional Middle Eastern geopolitical dynamics. Each of these bodies of literature is robust and crucial to understanding the Arab Peace Initiative. Given space limitations, however, they cannot be explored extensively. Instead, the following literature review will focus primarily on literature with direct links to the Arab Peace Initiative.

a. The Arab Peace Initiative: History of Literature

Research and literature on the Arab Peace Initiative is relatively new. Following the Initiative's launch in 2002, there were numerous articles and op-eds providing support and criticism for the initiative. Following these initial responses, however, there was a lull in the production of analysis on the Arab Peace Initiative. This is likely the result of a shift in international focus to the 2003 "Road Map."

In 2007, following the Arab League's relaunch of the Arab Peace Initiative, there was an additional increase in the production of literature regarding the Initiative's viability. However, similar to the aftermath of the Arab Peace Initiative's launch in 2002, the majority of the publicity vis-a-vis the peace process quickly shifted to focus on the Annapolis Conference and its eventual failure.

Finally, the past four years have seen an uptick of articles written about the Arab Peace Initiative. Political science academics and think-tank experts have increasingly questioned its viability amid the expansion of Israeli settlements, the Arab Spring, the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran, the rise of sectarianism, Iranian-Saudi tensions, the spread of radical Islamism, and other regional geopolitical developments. It is within this context that the authors would like to explore

this project's research question. The following section will delve into the key debates within the body of literature pertaining to the Arab Peace Initiative.

b. Key Debates

The literature largely falls into two different camps: (1) in support of the Arab Peace Initiative as a viable negotiating framework and (2) against the Arab Peace Initiative as a viable negotiating framework.

The key arguments in support of the Arab Peace Initiative as a viable negotiating framework are:

1. That the Arab Peace Initiative is not an all or nothing framework. It is flexible and thus, able to be amended to account for geopolitical developments that seemingly render elements of the Arab Peace Initiative irrelevant.
2. That its multilateral approach could be what is needed to incentivize the historically unsuccessful bilateral track.
3. That its end result, peace between Israel and the Palestinians as well as with members of the Arab world, is unprecedented.

The key arguments against the Arab Peace Initiative as a viable negotiating framework are:

1. That the Arab Peace Initiative is an all or nothing package and thus, any point of contention prevents the acceptance of the Initiative.
2. That it is largely irrelevant given the geopolitical developments in the Middle East.
3. The two-state solution is dead and thus, the Arab Peace Initiative's overall framework is irrelevant as it is based on the potentiality of a two-state solution.
4. That no Israeli government will agree to accept the demands on borders and refugees as outlined in the Initiative.

Beyond these central debates, the authors found that throughout the body of literature, the Arab Peace Initiative's viability appears to be contingent on four conditions. The following section will explore these conditions and associated questions.

c. Conditions

Condition 1: Capacity and Legitimacy of the Arab League and Israel to enforce Arab Peace Initiative Parameters-Are Israel and the Arab League capable of reigning in spoilers and simultaneously speaking on behalf of the Israeli and Arab general populations, respectively? Does Israel and the Arab League have the mechanisms and legitimacy to implement policies? What incentives exist for states to sign onto this/advocate for the Arab Peace Initiative?

Literature written by Nicholas Sambanis, a Professor of Political Science at Yale University, includes important analysis on capacity building and institutional transformation. Ultimately, in order for the Arab Peace Initiative to be viable in the future, relevant states will have to prepare and transform governmental and societal institutions in order to increase their capacity to ensure the long-term sustainment of the Arab Peace Initiative.⁵

Many literary sources argued that Arab League cannot claim to be a legitimate negotiating voice on behalf of the Arab world. Most within this camp believe that the Arab League's political, cultural, and economic clout has significantly eroded since--and to some degree, even before--the launch of the Arab Peace Initiative. However, some experts, such as Alia al-Kadi of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, claim that the Arab League still maintains a significant role in future peace negotiations and that it "may be up to the Arab League to boost [the Arab Peace Initiative's] marketability with a flurry of diplomatic and media marketing that stresses the merits of the offer."⁶

Similarly, there is also literature that questions the extent to which the Israeli government is capable or viewed as legitimate enough to deliver the demands of the initiative. Most of the debate regarding Israel, however, centers on the question of willingness versus capacity.

⁵ Sambanis, Nicholas. "How Strategic is UN Peacebuilding?" *Strategies of Peace*. Daniel Philpott, Gerard Powers. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2010. Print. pp 142.

⁶ Al-Kadi, Alia. "The Arab Peace Initiative: an Instrument for Peace." *The Atkin Paper Series*. ICSR. June 2010.

Condition 2: Incentives for Israeli adherence to and enforcement of the Arab Peace Initiative

Initiative-Why has there been silence from Israel vis-a-vis the Arab Peace Initiative? What are possible incentives for the Israeli government to respond/sign on? What are the main disincentives?

The majority of the literature on the Arab Peace Initiative suggests that there are notable incentives for the Israeli government to at least respond to the Arab Peace Initiative. More specifically, many cite that the initiative “offers a reshaping of the region that Israel has sought since its founding: the end of the conflict, normalized relations, recognition and security.”⁷ In order to understand how negotiation frameworks can and have been incentivized, the authors relied heavily on leading Israeli political scientist Dr. Galia Golan’s recent book, *Israeli Peacemaking Since 1967*. This work provides a comprehensive analysis of the conditions and factors that have led Israeli leadership to compromise on negotiation frameworks in the past.

There are others within the body of literature, however, who claim that the Arab Peace Initiative is an all or nothing initiative. Due to the inclusion of U.N. resolutions that Israel finds unacceptable, many claim that there is no necessity for Israel to respond.

Yet, according to Dr. Ghaith Al-Omari, former executive director of the American Task Force on Palestine and former Palestinian Authority official, the Arab Peace Initiative is not a zero-sum initiative by nature. Israel ‘gets’ peace and normalization from the wider Arab world and the Arab world ‘gets’ the end of the occupation of Arab land. Instead of a zero-sum, Dr. Al-Omari states that the problem with the Arab Peace Initiative that makes operationalization of the Arab Peace Initiative challenging is the fact that the Initiative “frontloads Israeli requirements and backloads Arabs in an all or nothing fashion.”⁸

⁷“How to make the Arab Peace Initiative a More Effective Incentive for Peace?” MITVIM - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies. (2016).

⁸ Dr. Al-Omari Interview.

Condition 3: Factors for operationalization of the Arab Peace Initiative- What political, social, economic, and diplomatic conditions make the Arab Peace Initiative operational? What are the policies and institutions that would potentially oversee and carry out the execution of the Arab Peace Initiative?

Sambanis' literature also focuses heavily on increasing costs of non-cooperation in order to reinforce bilateral participation in peacebuilding activities.⁹ Mutual efforts to increase costs of non-cooperation could pave the way for the continual participation of both parties in the advancement of the Initiative and lead to eventual operationalization. Israeli threats of non-cooperation could potentially increase pressure on Arab states to create conditions necessary for eventual normalized relations.¹⁰ Alon Ben Meir, an American expert on Middle East politics and affairs, contends Israelis will also demand that the Arabs demonstrate their capacity and political will to rein in extremists groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, should those groups refuse to heed to the collective Arab will.¹¹ Ultimately, the ability of the Arab League to reign in spoilers will be a major factor of potential operationalization. Other authors also mentioned that the Israeli Government, should it respond positively and officially to the Arab Peace Initiative, will also have to reign in extremists within its own camp.

Condition 4: Necessary Factors for normalization of the Arab Peace Initiative- Who are the internal and external actors participating in the development of the Arab Peace Initiative? How will those parties guarantee the reinforcement of the agreement?

In regards to normalization, Sambanis states that the key strategy of peacekeeping is the fostering of social and economic cooperation with the purpose of building confidence among parties previously engaged in conflict.¹² Ben Meir also considers confidence-building measures to be an important factor in the pursuit of normalization of Arab Peace Initiative parameters. For

⁹ While increasing costs of non-cooperation was a major theme in peacebuilding literature, it was not mentioned in any of the interviews. Nevertheless, Sambanis' and Ben-Meir's take on the costs of non-cooperation was ultimately useful in developing our second recommendation (identified at the end of the report).

¹⁰ Sambanis, 148.

¹¹ Ben-Meir, Alon. "Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative." *American Foreign Policy Interests*. (2009).

¹² Sambanis, 148.

Ben Meir, both sides must insist on the pursuit of normalized relations that translate into open trade, cultural exchanges, tourism, investments, and cooperation on various aspects of regional development.¹³

Meanwhile, Sharon Dolev, Director of the Israeli Disarmament Movement, also focuses heavily on the importance of public information campaigns to gain Israeli and Arab public support for the acceptable Arab Peace Initiative and the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations. For Dolev, an effective campaign must “transform the concepts of comprehensive peace, normalization, and ‘end of conflict’ to accessible concepts that can be imagined, accepted, and aspired to.”¹⁴

History also suggests that official economic and security relations can be normalized even in the absence of societal and cultural normalization, with Israel’s treaties with Egypt and Jordan as prime examples. However, it could--and likely will--take decades for cultural and societal normalization to fully materialize between Israel and the rest of the Arab world.

d. Contribution to Literature

There is minimal research investigating elite opinions simultaneously in Israel and in Jordan on the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative. Through this research project, the authors aim to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis on the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative that hinges on information provided by the most influential and informed players on the ground given geopolitical developments since 2002.

¹³ Ben-Meir, Alon. (2009).

¹⁴ Dolev, Sharon. “Why the Arab Peace Initiative is Good for the Israeli Public.” *Palestine-Israel Journal*. (2007).

V. Background

The section that follows delves into the history and significance of the Arab Peace Initiative as well as various responses to its launch in 2002.

a. Thomas Friedman & The Saudi Initiative

In early February 2002, *The New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman published a column “suggesting that the 22 members of the Arab League, at their summit in Beirut on March 27 and 28, make a simple, clear-cut proposal to Israel to break the Israeli-Palestinian impasse: In return for a total withdrawal by Israel to the June 4, 1967, lines, and the establishment of a Palestinian state, the 22 members of the Arab League would offer Israel full diplomatic relations, normalized trade and security guarantees.”¹⁵

Just a few weeks later, Friedman was in Saudi Arabia speaking with then-Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud. The conversation between Friedman and Prince Abdullah took place a little more than a month before the Arab League Summit in Beirut. In his own words, Friedman’s trip to the Kingdom was “part of the Saudi opening to try to explain themselves better to the world in light of the fact that 15 Saudis were involved in the Sept. 11 attacks.”¹⁶

At the outset of the conversation, Prince Abdullah jokingly accused Friedman of breaking into his desk, claiming it held a draft of a speech Prince Abdullah planned to deliver at the upcoming summit. Prince Abdullah argued that his draft featured a nearly identical initiative to Friedman’s proposal from weeks earlier. Prince Abdullah said to the journalist that he too wanted “full withdrawal from all the occupied territories, in accord with U.N. resolutions,

¹⁵ Friedman, Thomas. “An Intriguing Signal From the Saudi Crown Prince,” *The New York Times*. February 17, 2002.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

including in Jerusalem, for full normalization of relations.”¹⁷Friedman urged Prince Abdullah to put his statements on-the-record, stating that he had “a strong Arab following inside and outside the kingdom, and if he ever gave such a speech, it would have a real impact on Arab public opinion, as well as Israeli.”¹⁸

On February 17th, 2002, Friedman published an article entitled “An Intriguing Signal From the Saudi Crown Prince” in *The New York Times* featuring Prince Abdullah’s statements. With the release of the article outlining Prince Abdullah’s proposal, the Saudi Initiative was born.

Though not an official document, the Saudi Initiative showcased in Friedman’s article was simultaneously historic and unoriginal. It was historic in that it was the first time that Saudi Arabia, a regional and religious hegemony, had *publicly* supported a regional peace agreement with Israel. However, according to Eli Podeh, “The Saudi proposal was not created in a vacuum; apparently, Jordan, Morocco, and several key Arab League officials had been suggesting the idea in private but had not dared to broach it publicly until one of the major regional powers — i.e., Egypt or Saudi Arabia — took the lead.”¹⁹

In fact, King Husayn of Jordan had raised the prospect of a “multilateral Arab approach, which stipulated that the Arab states would establish diplomatic relations with Israel, initiate trade relations, and sign a security pact in return for full Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the founding of a Palestinian state” as early as 1998.²⁰

Despite the fact that such an idea had been proposed years earlier, much of Arab world was caught by surprise on February 17th and “a vigorous debate emerged in the Arab world

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dolev, 2007.

¹⁹ Podeh, Eli. “Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative, 2002–2014: A Plausible Missed Opportunity,” *Middle East Journal*, VOL 68, NO.4, Autumn 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

concerning the possible adoption of a modified version of the Saudi initiative as a pan-Arab peace plan.”²¹ While Syria raised concerns about the Golan Heights and the PLO expressed its frustration with the lack of a reference to the refugee problem, there was but mild criticism from other Arab League members.

The Israeli government did not officially respond to the Friedman’s publication because “the Saudi initiative — it was argued — had not actually been presented to it.”²² Rumors have since circulated that there was some effort by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon “to [privately] learn more about the initiative through various intermediaries.”²³ Such efforts, however, proved unsuccessful and the Israeli government focused on stifling the intifada.

Unlike the Israeli government, however, the Israeli media did provide an initial response to the Initiative, with most outlets claiming that adoption of such a proposal would never be acceptable as withdrawal from the territories posed a serious threat to Israel’s national security. There were, however, a handful of articles in the left-leaning *Haaretz* newspaper highlighting the Initiative’s potential.

Prime Minister Sharon did not make a public statement regarding the Saudi proposal until after the passage of U.S.-drafted U.N. Resolution 1397 that called for the immediate cessation of violence and for two independent Israeli and Palestinian states. Interestingly, the resolution specifically expressed support for Prince Abdullah’s new contribution to the debate.²⁴ Just days before the summit, Prime Minister Sharon “expressed readiness to present his terms for peace at the summit and asked the United States to arrange this visit” and that while “the Initiative is a positive development, its terms were too vague and that the reference to a full Israeli withdrawal

²¹ Ibid.

²² Podeh, 2014.

²³ Podeh, 2014.

²⁴ Security Council resolution 1397, *The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question*, S/RES/1397 (12 March 2002).

to the pre-1967 borders was unacceptable.”²⁵ Most of the Arab world viewed his statement as insincere and as a media trick.²⁶

b. The Launch of the Arab Peace Initiative: 2002

On March 27-28, 2002 the Arab League convened in Beirut for the Arab League Summit to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Dr. Muasher, however, the drafting process was far from easy:

“The drafting process was very difficult because the idea of the Arab Peace Initiative was to keep it simple and not to load it with references to Resolution 194 [which the Israelis opposed], but just to present it as a package deal: full peace for a full withdrawal. The Syrians did not like this one bit but because it was a Saudi initiative, and they could not confront the Saudis head on. So instead [the Syrians] used the Lebanese as a proxy. As a result, the Lebanese insisted that the Arab Peace Initiative include Resolution 194 in the text, but required a clause against repatriation. We thought it (repatriation) would overburden the initiative to the point where it will lose the power it had. And so the drafting of the text was very, very difficult. The Lebanese and the Syrians insisted on the explicit reference to Resolution 194. That is why we managed to insert the word, “*agreed solution*” to make it clear that any solution had to be agreed upon by all parties...including the Israelis.”

With these amendments, the Arab League unanimously endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative on March 28, launching an official document based on the parameters of Prince Abdullah’s proposed Saudi Initiative. There was little appetite, however, for potential peace plans in the Israeli government. Israelis and Palestinians were deeply embroiled in the second intifada. The major suicide attack known as the Passover Massacre, which killed 37 Israeli civilians, occurred just a day before the Arab Peace Initiative was released.

According Gadi Baltiansky, a former Israeli Government official and head of the Geneva Initiative, “This was the best possible initiative at the worst timing.”²⁷ According to Baltiansky,

²⁵ Podeh, 2014.

²⁶ الأمير سعود الفيصل في لقاء مع رؤساء تحرير الصحف السعودية: ولي العهد وبوش لا يناوران ومباحثات اليوم ستنتسم (2002, Apr 26). بالصرامة والوضوح (Prince Saud al-Faisal in a meeting with newspaper editors Arabia: Crown Prince and Bush are not wavering, talks today will be marked by frankness and clarity). Al-Jazirah. Retrieved from: <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2002/20020426/ln2.htm>

“The [Israeli] focus was only on the intifada and only on terrorist attacks. I remember it didn’t get the deserved attention. It was a combination of the reality on the ground and the leadership of Ariel Sharon who was not interested in peace with the Arabs”.²⁸

Similarly, Steve Linde, the current editor of the Jerusalem Post, and Seth Frantzman, op-ed editor for the Jerusalem Post, recalled, “We [The Jerusalem Post] made a big deal of it [the Arab Peace Initiative]. We splashed it all over the front pages.” They noted, however, that while the “Arab Peace Initiative seemed revolutionary and different, it came during a massively bloody conflict.”²⁹

Another former Israeli government official argued that the Passover Massacre and the intifada in general were used as excuses to explain a lack of Israeli response to the Initiative. Instead, he believed that the real failure of the Arab Peace Initiative’s launch--and the subsequent lack of Israeli response --was the result of poor Arab League marketing. He believed that there should have been a much larger effort to present the deal to the Israeli public.

The U.S. government also gave the launch of the Arab Peace Initiative little attention. The President Bush’s administration was occupied with Iraq. “The peace process was a side issue, but” as Dr. Muasher speculated, “...the Arabs cared about it deeply, and Bush needed Arab support in his war against Iraq.”³⁰ As a result, “(The administration) gave the [Arab Peace initiative] lip service, [but] they never really actively promoted it.”³¹ Instead, the U.S. Administration focused on promoting the “Road Map” and the Arab Peace Initiative has since gone largely unaddressed by the U.S. government.

²⁷ Gadi Baltiansky Interview.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Linde and Franzman Interview.

³⁰ Marwan Muasher Interview.

³¹ Ibid.

c. Historical Significance of the Arab Peace Initiative

The authors' literary research and series of interviews highlighted the fact that this initiative was primarily a product of Arab interests, while representing a major reverse of the famous "3 Nos of Khartoum." Ahmad Majdalani, a Palestinian politician, university professor, and researcher, described this as a "clear indication of [the Arab League's] resolve to opt for a strategic solution, and not a provisional or tactical one meant to buy time or to weather the crisis in relations between the Arab Countries and the international community, especially the United States."³²

Although the text of the Arab Peace Initiative has remained the same since 2002, the Arab League has annually renewed its commitment to the Initiative's negotiating framework--suggesting that it remains as a viable option on the Arab side. Furthermore, the Arab Peace Initiative is historically significant as it opens up the possibility for regional economic and security cooperation in an unprecedented capacity. If the Initiative is adopted, Israel and the Arab League could more publically collaborate on economic projects and confront their shared threats in the region such as radical Islamism and Iran.

³² Majdalani, 2007.

VI. Analysis

The assessment that follows is based on extensive research and interviews. It will examine each of the seven demands of the Arab Peace Initiative and analyze the extent to which each demand has or can be achieved based on the four previously discussed conditions (capacity, incentive, operationalization, and normalization) based on extensive research and interviews.

1. Requests Israel to reconsider its policies and declare that a just peace is its strategic option as well.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

Across the Israeli political spectrum, all interviewees insisted that they still saw the potential for peace between the Israel and the Palestinian people. Their vision for peace, however, varied significantly. Interviewees who aligned with the center, center-left, and left of the political spectrum highlighted that the current status quo of the conflict is unsustainable in the long term and that the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the two-state solution. For example, according a former Israeli Ambassador, the two-state solution is “very difficult to attend to, but it’s the only viable solution because any other one--presumably the other one is a one state solution--is a recipe for terrible problems in the future.”³³

Interviewees on the right, however, argued that the current arrangement is the best solution to ensure Israel’s security. For example, Eli Hazan, Director of International Relations and Communications for the Likud Party, claimed:

“I really believe in the current situation. I really believe that the alternative is much worse. There are two alternatives regarding the Palestinians. One is [having a] one state [solution that] gives the Palestinians citizenship. I am against that completely. On the other hand, the left wing, speaks about two states. I am against it, not totally but I am saying that the alternative is bad. For that purpose, I believe in the current situation [that provides] extended autonomy [to the Palestinians].”³⁴

³³ Confidential interview

³⁴ Eli Hazan Interview.

While the Israeli right and left's perception of what constitutes peace is clearly divergent, interviewees on both sides noted that peace is a strategic option and is preferred over continued bloodshed. To this end, the latter part of this first demand (that just peace is a strategic option) is indeed viable and has been achieved. The Israeli Government has declared that a just peace is its strategic option. In a recent Jerusalem Post article, Prime Minister Netanyahu voiced the importance of Arab countries in the peace process.

However, with Prime Minister Netanyahu's Likud Party leading an exceedingly fragile coalition, it has yet to reconsider its policies vis-a-vis the Palestinians. Ultimately, the exit of just one member of Knesset from the coalition could result in the dissolution of the entire coalition and prematurely trigger elections. According to Luke Baker, bureau chief of Reuters in Jerusalem:

“In simple ways, Netanyahu is capable and unwilling [to reconsider policies]. Abbas is willing but incapable. But, I think that also is too simplistic. I don't think Netanyahu can hold a government together and negotiate and I think holding a government together is more important for him. Even if he had a government that could support, that had the right balance of parties to support negotiation, I'm not sure that he would enter negotiations but he would fall back on needing the right partner on the other side.”

Yet, the reality of a challenging Knesset coalition does not mean that the current Israeli government is incapable of delivering on the peace process. If anything, the history of Israeli peacemaking has shown that often a right-wing leader is needed to secure a peace deal.³⁵ Mr. Linde claims that over his 25 years in journalism in Israel he's “noticed in recent years that the Israeli government's official position has been opposed to the plan [Arab Peace Initiative] -- especially Netanyahu. Behind closed doors or more discreetly, the government has realized that

³⁵ Golan, Galia. “Israeli Peacemaking Since 1967: Factors Behind the Breakthroughs and Failures.” UCLA Center for Middle East Development (CMED) Series. Routledge; 1st Edition (August 20, 2014). Print.

this plan is still on the table and there is still something to talk about.”³⁶ In fact, when one of the authors interviewed Mr. Linde at the Jerusalem Post, the newspaper had just printed a story highlighting Netanyahu’s call for Arab parties to be involved in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

According to Dr. Nimrod Novik, former foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Peres, there are four geopolitical developments that might incentivize the Prime Minister to reconsider his current policies vis-a-vis the Arab Peace Initiative: (1) instability in Jerusalem, (2) a surge in violence in the West Bank and Gaza, (3) pressure from the international community--and the Obama Administration more specifically, (4) the fragility of his right-wing coalition.³⁷

As these four geopolitical developments all place tremendous pressure on Netanyahu and will certainly continue to do so in the foreseeable future, it is possible that the Prime Minister will offer the very minimum he can at the last moment to ensure his political longevity. More specifically, Dr. Novik argued that:

“As we come closer to Nov 9 – where the U.S. elections are out of the way and the [U.S.] president may be free to pursue a more meaningful move regarding the Israeli-Palestinian issue; just as coalition restlessness associated with budget deliberations kicks in over here [in Israel]– Netanyahu may well surprise all by coming up with an initiative designed to preempt a U.S. move while resolving his coalition predicament. It will have to answer to three questions, which he must be asking himself, (1) what will it take to bring another party into the coalition? If Labor is the candidate, it must involve a move on the Palestinian issue, or they won’t come, (2) What is the minimum I have to offer to get everyone off my back: bring Labor in and take the winds out of a U.S. move; and (3) What is the last moment for that to take place – as no politician acts against his will before he/she reaches the conclusion that there is no way out... Hence the expectation that early November is a relevant context. I suspect that his answer to question number two will produce an initiative comprised of three components. I’ve seen some trial balloons to that effect, and if you put them together you get a set of measures to improve life in Gaza, prevent a humanitarian crisis and stabilize the ceasefire; steps designed to calm the situation and prevent escalation on the West Bank and in Jerusalem, involving civic, economic and other measures; all lumped together under an umbrella of a reiterated commitment to the

³⁶ Steve Linde Interview.

³⁷ Nimrod Novik Interview.

peace process, but not just by renewing vows to the two state solution, but by a qualified acceptance of the Arab Peace Initiative.”³⁸

Thus, if Netanyahu offers an initiative that is sufficiently robust to change dynamics on the ground--and includes both economic and political packages in the West Bank, it will be challenging for members of Knesset in the opposition to oppose his proposal. With the support of Isaac Herzog and other leftist parties, it may not be necessary for Netanyahu’s right-wing coalition to approve the Initiative.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

Arab emphasis on Israeli participation in a non-military solution to the larger Arab - Israeli conflict is evident in the opening statement of the Arab Peace Initiative text “Emanating from the conviction of the Arab countries that a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace or provide security for the parties...”³⁹

Most of the interviewees argued that confidence-building measures from the Arab side will only come as a result of Israeli cooperation in enforcing the Arab Peace Initiative’s parameters. Furthermore, most interviewees were skeptical of Israeli willingness to reconsider its policies. Yet, literary research and interviews suggest that both parties must demonstrate a commitment to regional peace through engagement in confidence-building measures in order to guarantee participation in the Initiative. Regarding such measures, Dr. Ahmad Shikara, a visiting researcher at the Arab Institute for Security Studies (Amman, Jordan), said:

“Some Arab countries already have treaties with Israel, including Jordan and Egypt, they have embassies in the countries, so it is important to exploit this opportunity to the widest form so that you could have this trust going on between Israel and the Arabs. The Arabs will have to do the same thing, meaning invite more Israelis to come to conferences...people who have intellectual

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Arab Peace Initiative, 2002.

minds and an academic approach to the issue should be involved. There need to be measures of confidence building measures thereby each turns to the other in economic and social terms.”⁴⁰

Ultimately, while the majority of the Arab perspectives place the ball squarely in Israel’s court to first respond to the Arab Peace Initiative, some interviewees suggested that simultaneously and strategically timing the implementation of confidence building measures could serve as a solution to jumpstarting stalled progress on the Arab Peace Initiative.

DEMAND 1: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE? Yes, interviews suggest that this demand remains viable, however, it will likely only be fulfilled with a change in leadership or if Prime Minister Netanyahu feels threatened enough to make compromises on policy. Alternatively, this demand could become increasingly more viable if the Labor Party joins Netanyahu’s coalition or if Netanyahu can get enough support from the opposition to override his conservative coalition.

DEMAND 1: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ARAB PERSPECTIVE? Yes. While a majority of Arab perspectives claim that the Israelis must accept the Initiative first, there is some indication that Arab states might be willing to increase confidence-building measures to incentivize Israel’s peaceful cooperation. Normalization of relations, however, is likely to be a long-term initiative.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Shikara Interview.

2. Further calls upon Israel to affirm:

I- Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

It is this line of the Arab Peace Initiative that most Israelis find highly problematic and unfeasible as result of geopolitical developments. Israelis across political spectrum claim that withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967 is impossible--largely because of the influx of settlement building inside the Green Line. Many interviewees highlighted that no Israeli government ever agreed to 1967 lines as a legitimate framework for negotiations and it is highly unlikely that a future Israeli government will either.

Furthermore, according to Shlomi Waroner, head of the Netanya Foundation and former Israeli government official, “Everyone, even Yair Lapid [centrist member of Knesset] and Avigdor Lieberman [right-wing member of Knesset], agrees that a 67 border” is indefensible.⁴¹ Thus, in terms of capacity to withdraw from all territories occupied since 1967, the Israeli government is incapable of delivering this demand of the Arab Peace Initiative.

In addition, for the current right-wing government, there are minimal incentives and/or willingness to withdraw on 1967 lines in the near term. Many interviewees indicated that any withdrawal would likely come only under with a change in leadership that views the current occupation in the West Bank as unsustainable. That does not mean, however, that the occupation of the West Bank will continue indefinitely. According to Yuval Rosenberg, a former IDF intelligence officer, “You have to look from the historical perspective: we [Israel have been] there for almost 50 years in Palestinian territories. It’s not really our future to stay. This is not

⁴¹ Shlomi Waroner Interview.

from my political view, but from the security view, military history, and to stay there it will be a kind of cancer to Israel. There is no way to run from this fact.”⁴²

Dalia Rabin, executive director of the Yitzhak Rabin Center and daughter of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, agreed. She noted that while peace might have been easier to achieve during her father’s leadership, it is important for Israel to continue to make steps forward. She said:

“I think that we had a very good chance in the 90s. I think my father was not naive. He was a very realistic and pragmatic leader and he thought that there was a window of opportunity that both sides could only gain from. We do not want to rule the Palestinians. We cannot afford to run their lives. It’s not good for us. For the better of Israel, we should part. It will happen eventually I believe because no one, even in this government, wants to rule the Palestinians.”⁴³

Furthermore, according to Zionist Union Member of Knesset Ksenia Svetlova, the Israeli Government *is* capable of delivering a withdrawal close to the 1967 border in a future peace deal:

“If you count that Israel would annex and land swap the first line territories that are close to the 1967 border, then it includes like 75% of all settlers--which leaves not such a big number. With the others, you can negotiate with them, you can offer some packages and there will be about 5%, which will be impossible to move. We [the Israeli government] will have to use force, but it’s like 5% of 400,000. It’s not that much. It’s problematic but doable.”⁴⁴

As it relates to withdrawal from the Golan Heights, most interviewees acknowledged that the geopolitical developments in Syria preclude any incentives for Israeli withdrawal. The mass atrocity that is the Syrian civil war begs the following question: To whom would Israel return the Golan Heights? Mr. Baker noted that there is a tacit understanding that the Israeli-Syrian border will likely stay as is for the long term and given the incredible instability in Syria, “it [the Golan Heights] ain’t going to Syria, do they [Israel] want to give it back to Al Qaeda or Al Nusra?”⁴⁵

⁴² Yuval Rosenberg Interview

⁴³ Dalia Rabin Interview

⁴⁴ Ksenia Svetlova Interview

⁴⁵ Luke Baker Interview

To this end, “It’s anachronistic to speak about peace with Syria and the Golan Heights. If you follow the Arab Peace Initiative letter by letter, it’s outdated,” according to Mr. Baltiansky.⁴⁶ Still, Mr. Baltiansky claimed that the Arab Peace Initiative is still a viable negotiating framework despite elements that are now irrelevant given geopolitical developments. Mr. Baltiansky claimed that the Arab Peace Initiative can be adapted to present times and that a principle of gradualism should be introduced into the framework.

For example, Mr. Baltiansky proposed, “If Israel moves a little bit, it gets a little bit. If Israel decides not to build in settlement and there is a freeze [on settlement building activity], then El Al airplanes can fly over Saudi Arabia on the way to India. Then, if there is settlement activity, it [over flight rights] stops.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the inclusion of gradualism into the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative provides incentives for the Israeli government to reconsider its policies. Ultimately, Mr. Baltiansky believes that the Arab Peace Initiative should be incentivized to the Israeli government and public by showing that:

“We [Israel] don’t have to pay more to get normal relations with the Arab world. That’s the main added value. By establishing some kind of relations, [though] not full diplomatic relations--and by linking it [practical/gradual steps] to progress in the peace process with the Palestinians--it demonstrates to the Israelis that we [Israel] are getting something and will get more.”⁴⁸

So too agrees a former Israeli diplomat, “If there is a new attempt [at negotiations], which doesn’t sound to be realistic [at the current moment], the terms [of negotiation] should be to try to solve gradually certain issues--building confidence upon the success of solving some issues and then moving eventually to the core issues--which the solution is necessary if we are to reach the desired goal of a two state solution.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Gadi Baltiansky Interview

⁴⁷ Gadi Baltiansky Interview.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Confidential Interview.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

While this specific demand requires very little in terms of the Arab League's capacity to act, interviews with Arab officials highlighted the occupation and a lack of existing dialogue with Israel as major impediments to the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative. For example, according to Dr. Shikara:

“In regards to the Palestinian question, all the Arab countries agree that there is an occupation happening that has to end by Israel and the West Bank, but how will they tackle the negotiation period and how will they get their act together? They need to look at it in constructive terms and they need to be more realistic also in the sense that if Israel has any ambitions that need to be tackled directly...no need to work in dark rooms, they need to be explicit about this. Whenever they have an opportunity in the UN for example, there need to be forums with the Israeli government and exchange ideas, because if I don't talk to you directly face to face I will talk to you through other parties and it will not be the same. If we talk directly, we will know what are each other's needs. The Israelis will be more at ease after this. The Arabs would actually be in a more advantageous position because they will be able to show the world that they are leading [the Arab Peace Initiative] and implementing it directly with the Israelis.”⁵⁰

While Dr. Shikara emphasizes the importance of dialogue with regards to the occupation, others were more hesitant about a future of dialogue and cooperation with Israel. Dr. Oraib Rantawi, director of the Al Quds Center for Political Studies, was critical of Israeli efforts to pursue normalization with the Arab states without the creation of an independent Palestinian state first. He argued that due to Israel's strategic upper hand in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “Israel has another 10 years without pressure. This will be enough time to enlarge more settlements, to build more separation walls and to make more control on the areas they want in the West Bank.”⁵¹ Ultimately, the increase in settlements makes it challenging for the Arab League or individual League members to compromise as the potential for land swaps becomes significantly more complicated.

⁵⁰ Ahmad Shikara Interview.

⁵¹ Oraib Rantawi Interview.

2. Further calls upon Israel to affirm:

II- Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

According to most Israeli elite and public opinion, a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict--and the Palestinian refugee problem specifically--will not be solved in accordance to U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194. Most Israelis reject the idea of full Palestinian right of return outlined in the resolution and it's unlikely that any future Israeli government will be willing to compromise and change its position vis-a-vis Resolution 194. Not only is the Israeli government incapable of absorbing all Palestinian refugees and maintaining its identity as a Jewish and democratic state, but also there is little incentive for the Israeli government to pursue such a policy at the current juncture.

That being said, this line of the Initiative mentions that the solution to the Palestinian refugee problem must be "agreed upon," highlighting the fact that Israel indeed does have some veto power in the final status agreement. To this end, while this line of the Arab Peace Initiative in terms of content is not viable from an Israeli perspective, the implication that there is room for negotiation means that there might be some flexibility on the Israeli position in the future.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

As indicated by Dr. Muasher in an earlier section, the drafting process was difficult as various Arab League member states different opinions vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugee problem in a final status agreement. Interestingly, the inclusion of this demand is largely the product of Lebanese and Syrian insistence to repatriate Palestinians to Israeli territory in the event of a permanent solution. One interview indicated that the Saudis would be willing to negotiate on this

demand and that the inclusion of this demand was simply a formality and/or a means to get Lebanese and Syrian approval.

While the authors' interviews with Arab officials revealed little regarding U.N. Resolution 194 specifically, multiple interviewees mentioned the relative flexibility of the Arab Peace Initiative as it relates to the refugee problem. In particular, interviewees referred to the Arab League Follow Up Committee's 2013 announcement that the Arab Peace Initiative would allow for land swaps in future negotiations--even though there is no mention of land swaps within the Arab Peace Initiative text. This announcement highlighted the fact that the Arab Peace Initiative could be reinterpreted to accommodate geopolitical realities on the ground. Therefore, it is possible to infer from the Arab perspectives that there is some flexibility on issues beyond land swaps--albeit not formally articulated in the Initiative.

2. Further calls upon Israel to affirm:

III- The acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

As previously stated in the analysis of Israeli opinion of the Arab Peace Initiative's demand 2.1, most Israeli elite believe that it will be impossible to create a two-state solution according to the borders of 1967, specifically as it relates to the West Bank. It's important to note, however, that the endorsement of a two-state solution is official Israeli policy. During his speech at Bar Ilan University in 2013, Netanyahu reasserted his commitment to this policy. The problems with this demand from the Israeli elite perspective, therefore, are not conceptual but rather deal with the specifics about implementation of a two-state solution as described in the Arab Peace Initiative.

When the Arab Peace Initiative was released in 2002, Israel was still occupying the Gaza Strip. In 2005, however, Israel disengaged from Gaza and withdrew all settlers and forces--thus highlighting Israel's capacity to withdraw--albeit unilaterally--from occupied territory.

Interviewees on the right of the political spectrum and some within intelligence community cited the election of Hamas to leadership in Gaza as a disincentive to disengage from the West Bank. Many interviewees feared that the withdrawal would result in a power vacuum upon which Hamas and radical Islamist groups could capitalize. Other interviewees questioned how a future Palestinian leadership would be able to reign in Hamas in Gaza in order to create a unified Palestinian state.

Interviewees on the center-left and left, such Member of Knesset Ksenia Svetlova, suggested that the two-state solution could be achieved with similar unilateral disengagement from the West Bank. MK Svetlova argued, "In the end, we should disengage and separate from the Palestinians [in the West Bank], two different collectives. In a perfect world, perhaps we could live side by side and go with each other for tea but it's not happening right now."⁵²

Again, this type of disengagement is unlikely under the current Israeli regime, however, it is important to note that such a plan exists on the table should a center or center-left-led coalition come to power. Interestingly, many interviewees indicated that the possibility for early Israeli elections looms on the horizon.

Finally, as it relates to the viability of East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian State, Israeli elite opinion was divided. According to Mr. Baker, it is the issue of Jerusalem that is most controversial: "Frankly, while everyone knows the parameters of a peace deal and the

⁵² Ksenia Svetlova Interview.

final status of negotiations, it will have to come down to what you do with Jerusalem. There is a dividing line within both sides.”⁵³

Those right of center insisted that Jerusalem remain unified whereas some on the left believed that should a final status agreement include East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state, the Israeli public would be willing to compromise. According to Shlomi Waroner, “Jerusalem is not a problem. Most Israelis think that the most important things are the holy places like the [Western] Wall. The places behind the [Western] Wall are not interesting for Jewish people, even though everyone talks about a united Jerusalem. [If East Jerusalem is] part of a final status agreement, [Israelis] will vote for it.”⁵⁴

This division, again, highlights the fact that there may indeed be capacity and incentives for this demand--or elements of it at least--but that the potential implementation largely hinges on the leadership in the Knesset.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspective

Arab interviewees primarily referenced the issue of a sovereign independent Palestinian state when asked questions about the incentives for normalized Arab - Israeli relations. From the responses of Dr. Abdullah Sawalha, Director of the Center for Israeli Studies, and Dr. Oraib Rantawi, Founder and Director General of the Al Quds Center for Political Studies (both located in Amman, Jordan), it became even more clear that the lack of movement on the Israeli-Palestinian track served as the major impediment to the actualization of normalized relations between Israel and the Arab world. First, Dr. Sawalha said:

“The major question is how can we agree to normalize relations without an independent Palestinian state? The problem is the Palestinian – Israeli track. I think that after the settlement of

⁵³ Luke Baker Interview.

⁵⁴ Shlomi Waroner Interview.

this track, then it will be easier for the larger Arab World to accept normalized relations with Israel and to expand the mutual cooperation, pertaining to water and energy, and even culture, military and intelligence, but in order to pursue any of this, it will be important to resolve the Israeli – Palestinian track.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, he emphasized that many Arab states are prepared to lay the foundations for normalized relations in the event of a movement on the Palestinian track:

“I think the biggest thing that we can offer to the Israelis is the normalization of relations. I think that there are mutual threats and mutual interests between the two sides. Economic projects are the key factors in this normalization, especially regarding the potential for Arabs to export Israeli gas. It is also important to focus in the frustration of the Palestinians and the growing third intifada. As a part of the peace talks, economic incentives are important. Both sides have to be realistic; the Palestinian issue must be a major element of the API.”⁵⁶

However, when asked about the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative, Dr. Rantawi was quick to highlight the current status quo of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict leaves questionable room for a future Palestinian state. He largely attributed this reality to a lack of pressure and incentives for Israel to end the occupation and to normalize relations.

Dr. Rantawi emphasized that the regional impact of Saudi-Iranian tensions must also be considered when discussing Palestinian issues and normalized Arab-Israeli relations. Dr. Rantawi’s interview largely focused on the extent to which a Saudi-Israeli collaboration against Iran would create conditions for normalized Arab-Israeli relations, while simultaneously removing the need to fully address the Palestinian issue and an Israeli commitment to the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative. He said:

“Now [the Israelis] have started to normalize their relationships with many Arab countries without being obliged to make any commitment, and there is a new factor which makes normalization possible. And what is this factor you ask? The conflict with Iran! The Saudis, and their allies identify Iran as the main threat towards security and stability... and Israel is a potential friend and ally in confronting Iran! Therefore they started normalizing their relationship, and there are secret visits by high-ranking delegations between the two countries

⁵⁵Abdullah Sawalha Interview

⁵⁶ Abdullah Sawalha Interview

without any relations to the Palestinian – Israeli conflict. Why should Israel bother to talk about the settlement of refugee issues and ending the occupation?”⁵⁷

Overall, Dr. Rantawi emphasized that Saudi-Israeli cooperation against regional threats is unlikely to blossom into fully normalized relations, potentially due to the lack of strong attention to the resolution of the Palestinian issue. Ultimately, Dr. Rantawi indicated that fully normalized relations based on existing evidence of Saudi - Israeli security cooperation are likely to be a false hope.

“Because of all of these situations in the regions, because of this shifting of priorities of the Arab regimes, because of the Iranian – Saudi divide and the conflict and the wars by proxy in many part of the world...yes, I can think there is a certain level of normalization [that can be reached] without reaching any peace between Israel and the Palestinians. But...I do not expect that it will go to the maximum. Always, the Palestinian issue will bother those regimes. If there is any chance to have any settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it will be a relief for the Arab regimes to take further steps in the normalization [of relations] with Israel.”⁵⁸

DEMAND 2: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE? By letter, no. With amendments, yes. There are elements within the Arab Peace Initiative that no longer remain viable options given the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, the dissolution of the Syrian state, and a potential dissolution in Lebanon. Withdrawal from the West Bank is feasible and Israel is capable, just not along 1967 lines. Polls in Israel indicate that the majority of Jewish Israelis want a two-state solution, but are unsure if it is feasible due to a perceived “lack of partner” on the other side. Where this demand remains viable is in the fact that the eventual solution to the Palestinian refugee problem must be mutually agreed upon.

⁵⁷ Oraib Rantawi Interview

⁵⁸ Oraib Rantawi Interview

DEMAND 2: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ARAB PERSPECTIVE? No. The Arab

interviewees emphasized the importance of resolving the Palestinian issue for the sake of the Arab Peace Initiative, while also highlighting various incentives for such a resolution. However, the interviewees were highly skeptical of any prospects for the resolution of this conflict.

3. Consequently, the Arab countries affirm the following:

I. Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspective

Most Israeli interviewees on either side of the political spectrum doubted the Arab League's capacity to guarantee that all members of the Arab League would consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended and provide security for all states in the region--especially since the Arab Spring. Most Israelis highlighted that the disintegration of the Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan, and Yemeni states pose more pressing threats to the members of the Arab League than the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts.

Even if a regional peace agreement were to be reached, some argued that it would be challenging to imagine that the Arab League has the capacity and enough incentives to come together to operationalize and normalize peace with Israel. While the Arab League might not possess the legitimacy as an institution to bring its members to rally behind a comprehensive peace agreement, some Israeli interviewees argued that critical member states within the Arab League might be able to individually play a role.

The way that many Israelis (as well as many Arabs) explain it, it does not necessarily matter if states like Sudan or Mauritania play an active role or agree to implement the terms of a future initiative. According to Yair Zivan, foreign policy advisor to Yair Lapid:

“The key [to bringing the Arab League and its members to the table] will come from the key players and if they are willing to drive the forces behind an agreement. Those [states] are Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf States. [Those key states must say,] ‘We want this [agreement].’ The Palestinians must say, ‘We want this [agreement]’, and that will hopefully drive the Arab League to get behind it.”⁵⁹

Furthermore, Mr. Baltiansky noted that despite the overall weakness of the Arab League, it still has an important role to play in the event that a peace is achieved:

“I think in real terms, maybe the Arab League is not strong to enforce every policy on every country and there are differences. In this context, it is less important. The context of the Arab Peace Initiative is not real diplomacy; it’s public diplomacy. If you want to get the public and the support of the public, [it doesn’t matter that] people don’t know about the real legitimacy of the Arab League. They [Arab public] hear the word and they think it’s legitimate.”⁶⁰

Beyond public diplomacy efforts, there are current indications that Israel and other Arab states in the region are already working on security initiatives with Israel, thus making the viability of future collaboration more feasible. Throughout almost every interview, Israeli interviewees highlighted the common threats that Israel and the major Sunni Arab countries share including the rise of Islamism; chaos and turmoil in Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, and to some degree in Lebanon; the expansion of ISIS; and the P5+1 and Iran nuclear deal. Additionally, almost every Israeli interviewee noted that they would willingly, albeit cautiously, accept a regional peace agreement with the Arab League should a peace agreement first be reached with the Palestinians.

In terms of Israel’s capacity to enter into a peace agreement with the Arab states and to provide security for all states in the region, there are elements of historical precedent that indicate that Israel would be capable. If it is any indication, the security relations between Israel, Egypt, and Jordan are very deep and strategic. According to Yuval Rosenberg, conversations

⁵⁹ Yair Zivan Interview.

⁶⁰ Gadi Baltiansky Interview.

between Israel and the Arab world vis-a-vis security have “always [taken place behind] closed doors, under the surface, [and are] not formal,” but have occurred nonetheless.⁶¹

Indeed, there is also major appeal and incentives for Israel to work with Arab partners in the future in terms of countering shared security threats. Even according to some members of Israel’s right, there is an appeal. For example, Likud’s Eli Hazan said regarding potential partnership in the future, “I hope in the future we [Israel and the Arab states] are going to work together.”⁶² The fact that a member of Likud hopes for cooperation with the Arab states is a strong indicator that future normalized relationships are viable.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

Annual affirmation of the Arab League’s commitment to the Peace Initiative suggests Arab willingness to end the conflict with Israel and pursue normal relations. Furthermore, some Arab League member states already maintain relatively stable political, social, and economic foundations necessary for a future of strong, normal relations with Israel. The international community and regional states’ confidence in the Arab League to enforce the Arab Peace Initiative is rooted in the fact that the League took a historic step in 2002 when it rescinded its position on the “Three Nos of Khartoum.”

Nevertheless, it is important to assess the actual capacity of the Arab states to follow through with the terms of Arab affirmation included in this draft. When asked about the capacity of the Arabs to enforce the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative, Dr. Sawalha highlighted an unfavorable reality by stating that “there are no mechanisms or even task force groups working

⁶¹ Yuval Rosenberg Interview.

⁶² Eli Hazan Interview.

on implementing the API. There are also no external partners creating pressure on the Israelis.⁶³ Meanwhile, Dr. Rantawi pointed out that Arab League members were divided over various regional and sectarian conflicts, suggesting that the League is incapable of uniting over the development of geopolitical mechanisms necessary to implement the Arab Peace Initiative.⁶⁴

In addition, and according to a high-ranking former Saudi official, “The Arab League is not yet qualified for this mission and is not capable of enforcing the Arab Peace Initiative’s parameters, but it can participate.”⁶⁵ He argued that the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan should act as “Peace Sponsors” to remove the obstacles that arise during dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Nevertheless, while these individual Arab states may possibly be engaged in the capacity building and institutional transformation necessary for long-term sustainment of peace treaties, as outlined Nicholas Sambanis, the Arab League as a whole is still largely unprepared for an accommodation of the demands of the Arab Peace Initiative.

3. Consequently, the Arab countries affirm the following:

II. Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

Using the peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt as a basis for analysis, it is most likely that should a hypothetical comprehensive peace agreement be forged, it will take decades to establish normal relations with Arab League member states. History has shown us, however, that the capacity for Israel to establish normal relations with its Arab counterparts is indeed possible.

⁶³ Abdullah Sawalha Interview

⁶⁴ Oraib Rantawi Interview

⁶⁵ Interview with high-ranking Saudi official.

Many Israeli interviewees referred to the need for something historic and equivalent to when Anwar Sadat came to the Knesset to announce Egypt's willingness to establish peace with Israel. According to Mr. Zivan:

"I could certainly see a scenario where an Israeli Prime Minister, whoever that may be, is standing with the Crown Prince of Riyadh, the President of Egypt, and some of the Gulf states saying "We are heralding in a new era." That has an impact on public perception. One thing people overlook is the importance of the public opinion. That Begin-Sadat moment isn't the reason Israel and Egypt reached peace, but it was a trigger moment that said that something here is different. We need to create that moment and part of that, is taking relations that most people tell you already exist behind the scenes on limited things and bring them out to the public. It's a tough sell. It's probably harder for the Arab states than for Israel."⁶⁶

Dr. Novik, however, claimed that such a historic move is highly unlikely. Instead, Dr. Novik argued that there are significant steps that Arab states and Israel can follow currently in order to set the stage for eventual normalization and operationalize the Arab Peace Initiative that collectively would have the same impact as a Begin-Sadat moment. Instead, Dr. Novik suggested the orchestration of a "zipper" of pre-agreed steps each side undertakes. It can begin with the mundane and gradually escalate to the more dramatic."

Dr. Novik explained, "At first, they will just be statements. Someone on one side reacts to something someone on the other side said. Let starts with statements and escalate into deeds. Some of it has already happened. There was an attempt to get it started, but – as often in our neighborhood – an outburst of violence spoiled it all." Dr. Novik indicated that Saudi Crown Prince Turki Al-Faisal's articles in Haaretz calling for peace in 2014 and 2015 "didn't come out of nowhere."⁶⁷

Second, regional states should increase financial investment in the future of a Palestinian state through the public and private sector. Third, Israel and Arab states should coordinate efforts

⁶⁶ Yair Zivan Interview.

⁶⁷ Nimrod Novik Interview.

to check spoilers that will likely be motivated to derail the process once more public cooperation between Israel and Arab states comes to the fore. Fourth, create a regional security framework.

This fourth point, Dr. Novik argued, is the most challenging and has yet to materialize. It is not an impossible feat, however, especially given the convergence of shared interests and threats between Israel and many Arab states. Among these areas of convergence include the rise of Daesh, Iranian activity, cross-border smuggling, regime stability in Jordan, and terrorist activity in the Sinai. Ultimately, “this realization, of common threats, propels everyone toward cooperation, but they are unable to 'go out with us in public' unless there is progress on the Palestine front,” Dr. Novik explained since “The Arab Peace Initiative [technically] says: once finish with the Palestinians we [the Arab League] are game.”⁶⁸ However, Dr. Novik argued:

“Even though an agreement with the Palestinians is no way near, dramatic change has already occurred. There was internalization of the need to demonstrate to the Israelis that the promise of normalization is for real. The way I'd put it is that the original language of the Arab Peace Initiative offers Israelis offered a trophy at the end of the road. Alas, most Israelis doubt the road: even the majority which supports a two-state solution doubt that it will happen in their lifetime. As the trophy is a reward for the end game, the same skepticism applies to the trophy. Hence the suggestion to transform the Arab Peace Initiative from a promise to an action plans: let's create two processes--a bilateral peace process with the Palestinians and a concurrent multilateral Arab Peace Initiative track.”

According to Dr. Novik, the Arab League no longer needs a final status agreement for elements of the Arab Peace Initiative to be jumpstarted but rather, it needs a “persuasive moment” with the Palestinians from Israel.⁶⁹ Once there is sincere Israeli movement on the Palestinian issue, Arab states would be willing to sit down with Israelis to discuss the points of contention within the Arab Peace Initiative and to move forward with a multilateral track that runs parallel to the Israeli-Palestinian track.

⁶⁸ Nimrod Novik Interview.

⁶⁹Ibid.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

The weak capacity of many Arab governments and civil institutions to implement terms of the Arab Peace Initiative is likely a product of a larger Arab society unprepared to accommodate normalized Arab-Israeli relations. Further analysis of normalization revealed the importance of dividing the possible from the impossible. As the Egyptian and Jordanian models demonstrate, normalization can move ahead in certain sectors under direct control of governments. This includes security, economy, trade, public health and environmental issues. Thus, it is possible to actualize certain aspects of normalization between the Arabs and the Israelis.

Dr. Faisal Odeh Al-Rfouh, Professor of Political Science at the University of Jordan, stated that while both sides face strong domestic opposition towards normalization, he emphasized his belief in an eventual exchange of culture by saying:

“I am sure that if the Israeli government accepts the Arab Peace Initiative as a package deal, both sides can implement it as a government initiative. They cannot use pressure against the people to have normalization. But the doors will be open for everybody to trade with the Israelis, to visit with the Israelis, and the same for the Israelis! They can go and visit Arab countries and start to establish trade relationships with the countries.”

However, it is clear that normalization in terms of societal acceptance and cultural exchange is a multi-decadal initiative. Over 60 years of biased education, media, and leadership have created a widespread and prevailing mentality in which it is impossible to consider an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Public information campaigns are highly necessary to gain Israeli and Arab public support for the Arab Peace Initiative and to establish a new reality in which normalization of relations becomes a critical aspect of negotiations related to the Initiative and therefore must prepare for such public campaigns of social indoctrination to take decades.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Dolev, 2007.

DEMAND 3: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE? Yes, albeit very hypothetically. Given the increase of shared security threats in the region it is possible to conceive that if there was progress with the Palestinians, Israel and major Sunni Arab states would be able to expand on already-existing security ties. Normalization of relations would likely take decades but is not impossible to imagine according to many interviewees. It would likely take a historic moment or a series of notable steps in order to convince the Israeli public of the sincerity of agreement.

DEMAND 3: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ARAB PERSPECTIVE? Yes, but not without problems associated with the lack of a widespread Arab societal commitment to Israeli recognition--which will be exceedingly challenging in an environment that is increasingly hostile to Israel. According to interviewees, normalization would be the final product of a long process beginning with capacity building according to interviewees. If the Arab Peace Initiative is adopted, it is possible for governments to move ahead with economic, environmental, and security-related aspects of normalization. The lack of such a culture will likely continue to frustrate the full realization of any future implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative.

4. Assures the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host Countries.

In both of the authors' interviews with elite in Jordan and Israel, interviewees did not touch on this element of the Arab Peace Initiative. As a result, the authors have minimal analysis to provide vis-a-vis the viability of this specific demand. It could be inferred that this demand is not viable for either Israelis or Arab states because "by rejecting 'patriation' (tawtin in Arabic) or

the resettlement of the refugees in any Arab state, the Arab Peace Initiative essentially leaves each refugee with no choice but to go to Israel itself’ or in a future Palestinian State.⁷¹ Given (1) the number of Palestinian refugees who have made their homes in Arab states, and (2) the fact that it is highly unlikely that an future Israeli government would allow Palestinians to resettle in Israel if a sovereign Palestinian state is created, it is unlikely that this demand could be operationalized even if it were to be a normalized idea.

5. Calls upon the government of Israel and all Israelis to accept this initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace and stop the further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighbourliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

While this demand essentially includes all other demands thus far outlined, there are indications that some elements to safeguard the prospects for peace are already in motion between Israel and the Arab States. According to Dr. Novik, there are certain steps that the Israeli government can pursue in order to keep the Arab Peace Initiative on the table while simultaneously moving forward on the Palestinian track.

First, if Netanyahu does indeed propose an initiative that is viewed as substantive and robust enough for Israel’s left and for the Palestinians, this demand remains viable.

Ultimately, if the Israeli government were to make significant strides on the Palestinian front and acknowledges its acceptance of the Arab Peace Initiative with reservations, it is possible that Arab states would be willing to cooperate with Israel on non-belligerent, non-military fronts

⁷¹ Halevi, Jonathan D. “The Palestinian Refugees on the Day After Independence.” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. (January 12, 2011). Page 1. Print.

including health initiatives, search and rescue efforts, humanitarian projects, and environmental protection in the region.⁷²

Second, if and when there is a final status agreement with the Palestinians, cooperation could ensue between the Israelis and Arabs via a multilateral track specifically devoted to ensuring security, stability, and prosperity in the region through the implementation of a regional security framework. Ultimately, the Palestinian track would allow Arab states to integrate Israel into a security arrangement and a security arrangement allows Israel to make more compromises with the Palestinians.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

Arab elite opinions toward this demand focused mainly on variety of potential actions to Israel could take in order to enable peace and good neighborliness in the region. According to Faisal Odeh Al-Rfouh:

“First off all, Israelis and Palestinians must share the land as friends or enemies. I make this point as a Jordanian who believes in peace and stability in the region. We believe that we have to share the region as friends and neighbors. Additionally, the various terms, including the Israeli withdrawal from the various territories, must be carried out. And there must be no more prisoners. Also there must be sharing of resources (ex. water), no nuclear weapons in the region and both sides must get rid of their weapons! For the Arab side, the boycott must be ended. We have to consider Israel as a part of the region!”⁷³

Meanwhile, Dr. Shikara focused heavily on the development of future generations to engage in socio-economic cooperation for future regional peace:

“When I look at the Israelis and their younger generation, I see that they don’t want any new wars. So it is a generational game as well. We need to look to this new generation. They think that mixing with each other in trips and exchanges of culture, meaning sending Palestinians and Israelis together to London or New York or Japan or China and being in the same group will cause them to work together...it could encourage cooperation on higher levels, because once you have NGOs working towards peaceful solutions...the new generation has the potential to work

⁷² Nimrod Novik Interview.

⁷³ Faisal Odeh Al-Rfouh Interview.

together as young people, they know each other, they live with each other...I put my money on those young people who come together, as they could really move the situation.”⁷⁴

However, General (Ret.) Mansour Abu Rashid, Chairman for the Amman Center for Research and Sustainable Environment, was less enthusiastic about the political climate in fostering a new mentality for the future generations. He suggested that Israeli political parties were undermining the prospects for future peace:

“I think that the difficulties come from the political parties of Israel...from the right and the left. Some people from the right don’t recognize the Palestinians as people. And some of the political parties in Israel do not believe also in any kind of solution to the refugee problem. They do not want any kind of relationship with the neighbors. They want to build a wall. Also, they control the political threats in Israel. But if you have a group in Israel asking about peace between the Israel and the Arab countries, 60% of the people support initiatives for peace.”⁷⁵

Yet, General Abu Rashid highlighted that Israeli psyche is rooted in a history of suffering and it is this suffering that informs Israeli policy formulation:

“The Israelis have suffered a lot. They don’t want the next generation of children to suffer like the people in 1948. They need the kids and the next generation to live in peace and not to be afraid, and not to suffer from time to time under the ground...they don’t want a repeat of what happened in Gaza three years ago. Many of the Israelis are living in fear of attacks, but instead want to live as human beings. Unfortunately the political parties who are running the government now don’t want it [peace]. They don’t want peace with the neighbors, describing the situation around them as unstable. The future is not for the Israelis if they don’t have peace. This is the whole case for the signing the agreement.”⁷⁶

Ultimately, General Abu Rashid emphasizes that the failure of both sides to safeguard the prospects of peace would guarantee a future of instability for generations to come. Indeed, the General was convinced that the reluctance of Israeli political parties to pursue a resolution to conflicts with its neighbors was likely to reinforce this guarantee.

⁷⁴ Ahmad Shikara Interview.

⁷⁵ General (Ret.) Mansour Abu Rashid Interview.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

DEMAND 5: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE? Yes, it is viable for Israel to live in peace with its neighbors so long as it feels that there are enough benefits and incentives that make the risks associated with a regional cooperation acceptable.

DEMAND 5: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ARAB PERSPECTIVE? According to Arab opinion, this demand is viable and indeed desired, but is contingent upon Israeli action. Ultimately, the interviewees primarily expressed skepticism and at most, cautious optimism vis-a-vis the realization of this demand at the present juncture.

6. Invites the international community and all countries and organizations to support this initiative.

Immediately following the release of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Arab League formed the Arab Peace Initiative Follow Up Committee comprised of representatives from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco. To date, there has been little success in recruiting other third parties to join in this special committee. While the United Nations has acknowledged the Arab Peace Initiative and King Abdullah's efforts in various statements and resolutions (the United States included elements of regional cooperation in past peace processes such as Annapolis), the international community still remains exceedingly uninvolved in the promotion of the Arab Peace Initiative. Given the interconnectedness of demands six and seven, the analysis can be found under the following section

7. Requests the chairman of the summit to form a special committee composed of some of its concerned member states and the secretary general of the League of Arab States to pursue the necessary contacts to gain support for this initiative at all levels, particularly from the United Nations, the Security Council, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the Muslim states and the European Union.

A. Viability According to Israeli Perspectives

Ben Meir argued that while it is up to Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt to influence the future of the Arab Peace Initiative, the only role for external actors in the Arab-Israeli peace process is to persuade both sides to exert political and material pressure on various aspects of the peace process.⁷⁷

Most Israeli interviewees on both sides of the political spectrum highlighted the need for Israeli and Palestinian teams to eventually come together in bilateral talks, but that there is a need for a third-party facilitator in future negotiations. While the Arab Peace Initiative does not name Arab states as facilitators, but rather as an added bonus once the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian deal is concluded the majority of Israeli interviewees indicated that they would be willing to have major Muslim Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt as mediators.

Interestingly, there was a great divide between Israeli interviewees regarding the role of the United States in future peace negotiations. Interviewees from the center to left tended to argue that the United States has not produced a significant peace agreement in many years and that its role in successful negotiations was far more limited than the credit it received. One interviewee suggested having Muslim states such as Indonesia serve as a main facilitator for negotiations instead of the United States. Interviewees on the right, however, argued that the

⁷⁷ Ben-Meir, Alon. "Abandoning the Quartet in Favor of the Arab Peace Initiative." *The Huffington Post*. (December 3, 2015).

United States remains the most powerful player in the international arena and any future round of negotiations would require that they be at the table.

B. Viability According to Arab Perspectives

Arab opinions highlighted the lack of strong external partners in the Arab Peace Initiative, while also suggesting that a capable third party could enhance the capacity of the various states involved to carry out the terms of the Initiative. Dr. Shikara expanded upon the need for external actors to be active but cautious in their role with respect to the balance of power between the two parties. He said:

“[The Arabs and Israelis] will not succeed in implementing the API if there is no third party. Usually, both sides look to the Americans. Now, regarding the American position towards Israel, which is too amicable and too strong in terms of support for Israel as a strong party in the Middle East, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, as I understood, indicated that he wanted the Israelis to be a strong party, and this is difficult as the Arabs regard this as an imbalance of power. There needs to be a statesman to reassure Israel that it is a part of the region and a power to be reckoned with...and also that its exercise of that power needs to be acceptable and under terms of agreed-upon negotiations.”⁷⁸

Dr. Shikara was confident in the role of the U.S. as a highly capable third party, despite its unpopularity in the region. In regards the influence of the third party on the capacity of the parties to implement, Dr. Shikara said:

“There is so much capacity building that can be done, and you can build on common grounds. America and the Arabs have common grounds in trying to resolve this issue and what you need is a good will and you need balanced statements from the Americans, particularly because, no matter what other prominent people say, they are the people who know that if you build a new environment, everything else can be settled. I think it will take time and stages and phases, but we remember around the time of Camp David that we had some negotiations going on, and when Clinton made the negotiations between Yassir Arafat and Israel, there were long discussions going on, so always the Arabs and the Israelis look to the Americans as allies. There is a sense of doing something constructive. But it needs the Americans to advance the situation.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ahmad Shikara Interview.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

DEMAND 7: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE? While the current Israeli government has expressed its opposition to international pressure on foreign policy decisions, it is possible that it is exactly such pressure that could incentivize Netanyahu to make necessary concessions. Furthermore, the inclusion of other international actors in negotiations is a viable option according to Israeli elite opinion.

DEMAND 7: VIABLE ACCORDING TO ARAB PERSPECTIVE? Yes. Some interviewees believed that it is still possible for the United States to influence the peace process. However, this third party role requires an administration that is determined to build the peacemaking capacity of both parties.

VII. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Literary research and extensive interviews of elite opinion suggest that the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative is not a viable negotiating framework as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts if taken by the letter. Furthermore, both Israeli and Arab elite opinion agreed that the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative or any comprehensive regional peace agreement ultimately lies within the success of jumpstarting the stalled Israeli-Palestinian track. Yet somewhat surprisingly, Israeli and Arab elite both agreed that there are elements within the Arab Peace Initiative that are significant steps that should not only be incorporated into an future peace negotiations, but that can also be implemented *before* the a final status agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. This means that the Arab Peace Initiative no longer insists that there be a final status resolution, but rather progress. Therefore, this means that the bilateral track (Israeli-Palestinian) AND the multilateral (Israel-Arab League) can occur at the same time and could

ultimately reinforce each other. It's likely that the more movement on the bilateral track, the more "goodies" the Arab League can give to Israel (economic cooperation, trade, environment, humanitarian crisis, etc.). Through thoughtful steps, this process could increase the costs for non-cooperation.

Such steps could include remarketing the Arab Peace Initiative to the Israeli public as a means to lay the foundation for potential normalization of relations, incentivizing economic and security cooperation for later operationalization, and introducing gradualism into the framework for negotiation. Through research and interviews, the authors have found six recommendations for U.S. policy makers to consider vis-a-vis the viability of the Arab Peace Initiative:

1. There is general sentiment that the U.S. is no longer viewed as a productive mediator between Israelis and Palestinians. The authors recommend that the U.S. should include critical Arab states in a U.S.-led negotiations process--similar to the P5+1 model.
2. The U.S. should encourage both parties to engage in increasing costs of non-cooperation in order to reinforce bilateral participation in the advancement and operationalization of the Arab Peace Initiative.
3. The U.S. should work with the Israeli government to craft an official response to the Arab Peace Initiative that highlights its general acceptance of a regional peace agreement, but underscore its reservations regarding certain demands and terms.
4. A small group of like-minded Arab countries can take the lead under the Arab League umbrella, thus compensating for the weakness of the Arab League. Such a group can serve as a political bulletproof vest for the Palestinians to make tough concessions when it has to do with broader Arab concerns.
5. The U.S. should work with the Arab Peace Initiative Follow Up Committee to help better market the Arab Peace Initiative to the Israeli general public.
6. The U.S. should provide political coverage for its Sunni allies and Israel by hosting Track I and Track II security conferences as a means for continued conversations behind closed doors.

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