

# The European Union Dilemma: Israel, Palestine and the Geneva Initiative

By [Am Johal](#)

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From November 2004 until March 2006, Israelis and Palestinians will have seen the following happen in only seventeen months: the death of Yasser Arafat, the election of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority, the first withdrawal from Gaza and four West Bank settlements since 1967, a centrist breakaway from the ruling Likud Party in Israel and a new leader of Kadima and the Labor Party, a debilitating stroke which has incapacitated former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the election of Hamas in Palestinian legislative elections and the upcoming Israeli elections in March.

Only in Israel is it a normal week when the Acting Prime Minister openly threatens to kill the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority if there are acts of violence. The EU and the US were once again hopelessly silent not wanting to interfere in what is now deemed to be the normal political culture of Israel. The normalcy of this type of rhetoric in the public sphere only legitimizes a deformed political environment which has led to continued dysfunction in dealing with the conflict. The Israeli mainstream is living in a bubble - it is like an ostrich that buries its head in the sand. After all, under this narrative acting tough is strong leadership, promoting peace is a sign of weakness.

Ehud Olmert has also openly called for a unilateral drawing of the boundaries in the West Bank. Israel has also continued its assassination policy which has included the recent killing of innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli left is also energized with the election of Amir Peretz to lead the Labor Party. Though Labor may not win the upcoming election, they may be in a position to set the agenda in the coming years. They have shown much more willingness to work with Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to work on a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Olmert has now announced that he intends to set new borders for Israel by 2010. The new lines, he said, would include large settlement blocs - Ariel, Ma'aleh Adumim and Gush Etzion - and the Old City and adjacent neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. According to Haaretz, the border would be marked by the separation fence, which would be moved at certain points, and Israel would maintain security control over the Jordan Valley. The settlements outside the fence would be evacuated. The settlement blocs would be strengthened, and Israel would build up the disputed E-1 zone between East Jerusalem and the settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim.

The Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas or Hamas would have no political credibility if they supported such a one-sided plan. A leading Hamas figure recently said that

this action is akin to an open declaration of war. The European Union responded by once again threatening to cut off aid to the Palestinian Authority. The EU is quickly losing credibility as an honest broker in the region. In the mid-term, the Geneva Initiative may provide the most realistic option for an interim final status agreement in the region for a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine. In any event, the conditions for a third intifada erupting are still preventable but the momentum is going the other way.

In the contemporary context, the European Union's engagement in the region is an important foundation from which to approach emerging challenges in the region. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnerships signed as part of the Barcelona Process in 1995, were designed from the outset to be long-term in their structure and scope. The Association Agreements which were eventually signed were distinguished from earlier partnerships in that the focus was more on economic and trade agreements than on development assistance. There was, however, important language built in to the agreements related to social and human rights issues.

The main objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership as set out were:

1. the creation of a zone of peace and stability on the principles of human rights and democracy;
2. the construction of a zone of shared prosperity by the gradual setting up of an area of free trade between the European Union and its Mediterranean partners and between these same partners, accompanied by large financial support from the Community to facilitate economic transition and help partners deal with the socio-economic challenges caused by this transition;
3. the improvement of mutual understanding between the peoples of the region and the promotion of free and flourishing civil society, thanks to the organization of cultural exchanges, the development of human resources and support for civil societies and social development. [1](#)

By attempting to create a permanent dialogue between the nation-states in the Mediterranean, there have been numerous processes, roundtables, civil society forums and funding opportunities for civil society development. By moving beyond decision makers and technocrats, the European Union and its Mediterranean partners have also sought to institutionalize multi-level engagement which has brought together other artistic, social and cultural opportunities for involvement. The institutionalization of dialogue through multiple channels and the development of civil society networks has been one of the legacies of the European Union in its engagement in the Mediterranean region. Malta and Cyprus have also joined the European Union. [2](#)

In the journal *Confluence*, Agnes Chevalier wrote:

The Euro-Mediterranean Agreements are substantially different from previous development assistance agreements. They are based on the principle of adherence to disciplinary rules and a series of values. In the traditional fields of economic aid, particularly commercial preferences, and financial assistance, the approach has been radically changed. Commercial preferences will from now on be reciprocal for there will be a two-way exchange of trade in industrial products, while European grants will be linked to conditionalities. It is an important

change. With commercial reciprocity, the Euro-Mediterranean relationship will no longer be one of assistance, it will become the partnership that has been invoked for so many years (to the point that the EU could seem, in the short term, as the main beneficiary of regional free trade). The prospect is much more demanding for the Mediterranean economies which must open up to competition [...] It is now known that it is only by opening up internationally that the developing economies can hope to improve their standard of living... [3](#)

Many critics have argued that the many new structures created for the European Union to engage with the Mashreq and Maghreb countries such as the Euromed Civil Forum serve to legitimize the political economy underlying these very agreements. Just as setting up many of these forums was designed for the purposes of moving beyond direct foreign diplomacy and the meta-narratives of international relations, but to create direct linkages between important areas of society where decentralized cooperation can occur between “those responsible for political and civil affairs, the cultural and religious world, universities, researchers, media, associations, trade unions and private and public enterprises [...] To do this, action that supports democratic institutions and the reinforcement of the rule of law and civil society will be supported.” [4](#)

Liberalization of economies and developing democratic institutions in the Arab world remains a policy imperative of the European Union and the United States. The US in particular would like to frame agreements in a similar way to the Helsinki Accords which were signed in the 1970's with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc as a structure to promote liberalization.

The Euro-Mediterranean Agreement was signed in 1995 and entered into force on June 1, 2000. The Euro-Mediterranean Committee on the Barcelona Process serves as the central planning group for the various committees and subcommittees. According to an internal evaluation by the European Commission:

Barcelona is the only context for ministerial meetings in which Israel, Syria and Lebanon participate. This is not without its importance during the last three years when the Middle East peace process has been blocked. Since the Barcelona Conference (1995), the foreign affairs ministers of the twenty-seven partner countries have met periodically, in Malta (1997), Palermo (1998 - informal meeting), Stuttgart (1999) and Lisbon (2000 - informal meeting). In addition, twelve ministerial sectoral meetings have been organized during this period. [5](#)

Yet another network in this framework is a group of senior officials from these various nation-states which are responsible for policy, security coordination, human rights and peace building. EuroMesCo organizes training seminars in five fields including: political dialogue and security among the partnership, interdependencies, foreign policy and mutual security (the PESC programme), sub-regional cooperation and governance issues. Euromed has also allocated funds to the maintenance of social cohesion in partner countries where privatization and other aspects of economic reform are occurring. The failure of the Camp David Accords, the initiation of the Second Intifada and the events of September 11th served to heighten the importance of this process in the long term beyond the official diplomatic channels. [6](#)

Although Europe has a greater interest in Central and Eastern Europe economically, the Mediterranean countries play a significant role in regards to European Union immigration issues and in relation to the strategic significance of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the

broader Israel/Arab regional conflict.

## **European Union**

In 1999, Israel received close to 50% of foreign direct investment from the then 15 member states of the European Union directed at Mediterranean countries followed by Turkey. Between 1993 and 1999, the foreign capital formation of the Mediterranean countries by the member states of the European Union fell from 7% to 4% despite the signing of Association Agreements with the European Union. [7](#)

Currently the relationship has become more developed and economic integration is continuing to increase:

In 2004 the total volume of bilateral trade (excluding diamonds) came to over €15 billion. Thirty three per cent of Israel's exports went to the EU and almost 40% of its imports came from the EU. In 2004, Israel's exports to the EU, excluding diamonds, were composed of electrical machinery and equipment (39%), chemical products (17%), plastics and rubber (9%) and optical measuring and medical instruments (8%). Its major imports from the EU were electrical machinery and equipment (35%), chemicals (13%) and base metals (6%).

Total EU (25 Member States) trade with Israel rose from €19.4 billion in 2003 to 21.36 in 2004. EU exports to Israel reached €12.75 billion in 2004, while imports from Israel were €8.6 billion. The trade deficit with Israel was €4.15 billion in the EU's favour in 2004. [8](#)

In the European Union, there were nearly 18 million 'non-nationals' before the expansion of ten new countries representing 5% of the population. 67% of these were in Germany, France and Great Britain. With lowering birth rates and aging populations in the European Union, the need for labor in low skill jobs in an economically expanding Europe coupled with high unemployment rates in these Mediterranean countries. [9](#)

Even though there is on the surface a need for migration from these Mediterranean countries, there has been an expansion of the theme of 'Fortress Europe.' According to one writer:

The European security services are undergoing a huge expansion, with the reinforcement of the powers of customs and police officers, the creation of a European judicial area, harmonization of the Schengen procedures, the weakening of controls over expulsion, increasing difficulties in obtaining visas, etc. [10](#)

Europe is faced with the dilemma of requiring immigrant labour, but not wanting an immigrant society. The debate regarding Turkey's accession to the European Union is a salient one related both to Islamic and economic factors. Added to this are increasing tensions with its own Muslim communities since September 2001 amongst member states of the European Union. The recent bombings in Spain, London and the controversy over the Danish cartoon strip depicting Mohammed as a terrorist are recent examples. Despite numerous opportunities for engagement, many view this issue of labour as a strategic issue to be viewed from social, economic, cultural and security perspectives. [11](#)

The European Union is a secondary player to the United States in the region. The European Union is also one of the four partners that form the Quartet as the negotiating parties to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict which includes Russia, the United States and the United Nations. The European Union has actively attempted to facilitate relationships between the

Arab states of the Mediterranean and Israel on trade related matters. They have also created forums to establish economic, diplomatic, academic and non-governmental organizational contacts. [12](#)

The push for liberalization of the developing Mediterranean nations has the willing support of the European Union and international institutions as a sign of progress that these modernization initiatives will bring about democracy. Some critics of this process have claimed:

With this model, the authoritarianism of governments is tolerated, on the sole condition that they comply with the injunction to open their markets. Thus we have a totally original situation, political authoritarianism coupled with an economic liberalism that enjoys the support of the 'democratic' Western states. [13](#)

NGO's and civil society have increased substantially since the beginning of the Barcelona Process actively supported by the European Union and various member states.

In the official words of the European Union:

The objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy is to share with neighbouring countries the benefits of the EU's enlargement to 25 Member States in 2004 through strengthening stability, security and well-being for all concerned. It is designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation. [14](#)

In December of 2004, the Presidency of the European Union in a report related to the EU-Israel workplan as part of the Association Agreement wrote:

The European Council considers that Israel, on account of its high level of economic development, should enjoy special status in its relations with the EU on the basis of reciprocity and common interest. [15](#)

The European Union's support of the Middle East Peace Process has been buttressed by their relationship with Israel through the Association Agreement and related documents which have been ratified. This work is centered around:

1. Political dialogue and cooperation
2. Industry, trade, services and internal market
3. Justice and legal matters including migration and organized crime
4. Research and innovation in education, science, technology and culture
5. Transport and Energy cooperation between Israel and Palestine
6. Customs and taxation [16](#)

The European Union's role in the peace process has developed since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Since the convening of the Barcelona Process in 1995, the failure of the

Camp David Accords in 2000 and the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the European Union joined with the United States, Russia and the United Nations to form the Quartet as part of the Roadmap to Peace. The European Commission Delegation to Israel is responsible for official relations between Israel and the European Commission. [17](#)

Article 2 of the Association Agreement includes clauses on human rights. The European Union has yet to build in effective enforcement mechanisms related to these commitments.

Since April 2005, the EU and Israel have:

discussed the Middle East Peace Process, anti-Semitism, human rights and minority issues in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, Israeli accession to international organizations, counter-terrorism, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, trade and services liberalisation, facilitation of Palestinian trade, regional cumulation of rules of origin, and a number of specific trade points. [18](#)

### **EU - Occupied Palestinian Territories**

The European Union included the Palestinian Territories as part of the European Neighbourhood Process in 2004 and originally signed an interim Association Agreement in 1996. In 2004, the European Union wrote a Country Report on the Palestinian Territories and in 2005 adopted a European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan. On October 5, 2005, the European Union adopted a Communication entitled [\*EU-Palestinian cooperation beyond disengagement - towards a two state solution\*](#). Its primary focus is on:

Achieving political viability requires reinforcing legitimacy and accountability of administrative structures, strengthening rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as improving security, engaging civil society, and making public administration more efficient. Protecting the status of the Arab population of Jerusalem, and addressing the refugee issue beyond immediate humanitarian needs will also be important.

Economic viability will be achieved through: developing bilateral and trade relations, building up a customs administration, reconstructing and rehabilitating West Bank and Gaza Strip, creating the enabling environment for private sector investment, improving the management of public finances, developing a knowledge based economy, and addressing the social dimension. [19](#)

The European Union has tied development assistance funds to conditions which require institutional reform including improved accountability mechanisms and enhanced transparency of systems. With the recent election of Hamas in legislative elections, this area of conditions will be under heavy scrutiny from both sides. As well, the European Union has heavily contributed to democratic transition in the Palestinian Territories including sending observer missions to the Palestinian Presidential elections in 2004 and the legislative elections in 2006. The European Commission Technical Assistance Office to the West Bank and Gaza Strip performs a similar function in the Palestinian Territories. [20](#)

The European Parliament is involved in determining and monitoring “the foreign policy position with regard to the allocation of major technical and financial support programmes for third countries.” The European Commission has regularly developed statements and positions on policy in support of both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority acting to fulfill their international obligations. [21](#)



## The Second Intifada

After the First Intifada which lasted from 1987 to 1993, Israel and PLO signed on to the Oslo Accords in the spirit of peace built around the idea of mutual recognition and support for a negotiated two-state solution. This process was prematurely derailed by the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by a right wing Jewish extremist.

After the collapse of the Camp David Accords in 2000 under the leadership of US President Bill Clinton, the conditions for peace were once again altered. The Israeli side presented the collapse as “Barak’s Generous Offer” while the Palestinian side portrayed it as “Barak’s Big Lie.” Yasser Arafat left the negotiating table in July of 2000 and began planning for a Second Intifada. [22](#)

US Ambassador and negotiator Dennis Ross later wrote:

There is little prospect of mediating any conflict if one does not understand the historical narratives of each side. I say this not because it is important to perpetuate the historical debate or because one side can convince the other that it is wrong, but rather because both sides in any conflict must see that a third party understands why it feels the way it does, why it values what it values, why its symbols say so much about its identity.

Peacemaking in the last decade emerged from a historical context of deep-seated grievances and desire for justice on both sides. Arabs and Israelis each have a narrative that tells their story and interprets their reality, and these narratives were lurking in every discussion. To understand these narratives, one needs to know what shaped them; how they evolved; and how particular historical developments affected attitudes and beliefs. Only then can one appreciate what we had to contend with in trying to promote peacemaking. [23](#)

On September 28, 2000, Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount with 1,500 security personnel which was widely interpreted as provocative. The Palestinians responded by throwing stones and the ensuing military crackdown left dozens killed in the weeks and months that followed. In the five years that followed, over 4,000 people died in Israel and the Palestinian Territories combined in the period known as the Second Intifada. [24](#)

In December of 2000, in a last ditch effort US President Bill Clinton met with Israeli and Palestinian envoys and made what was reported to be a final offer of 97% of the West Bank, with a capital in East Jerusalem, a return of refugees to Palestinian Territories but not Israel and a \$30 billion compensation fund for refugees. Many have disputed the details of this offer and about the seriousness of the actual proposal. The current Geneva Initiative, an extraparliamentary process with civil society involvement, bears some similarities to this final status agreement and is widely circulated as the consensus amongst moderate Israelis and Palestinians who support the two-state solution. The proponents of the Geneva Initiative claim they have majority support of Israelis and Palestinians for the agreement. It was completed in December 2003 and fits within the framework of historical agreements which have been signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority during various stages of the peace process including the Oslo Accords and the Roadmap to Peace. The language within the Geneva Accords includes the following:

*Confirming* that this Agreement is concluded within the framework of the Middle East peace process initiated in Madrid in October 1991, the Declaration of Principles of September 13,

1993, the subsequent agreements including the Interim Agreement of September 1995, the Wye River Memorandum of October 1998 and the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum of September 4, 1999, and the permanent status negotiations including the Camp David Summit of July 2000, the Clinton Ideas of December 2000, and the Taba Negotiations of January 2001;

*Reiterating* their commitment to United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397 and confirming their understanding that this Agreement is based on, will lead to, and -by its fulfillment- will constitute the full implementation of these resolutions and to the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its aspects;

*Declaring* that this Agreement constitutes the realization of the permanent status peace component envisaged in President Bush's speech of June 24, 2002 and in the Quartet Roadmap process.

*Declaring* that this Agreement marks the historic reconciliation between the Palestinians and Israelis, and paves the way to reconciliation between the Arab World and Israel and the establishment of normal, peaceful relations between the Arab states and Israel in accordance with the relevant clauses of the Beirut Arab League Resolution of March 28, 2002; and

*Resolved* to pursue the goal of attaining a comprehensive regional peace, thus contributing to stability, security, development and prosperity throughout the region; [25](#)

In 2001, Ariel Sharon and his Likud Party won the election against Ehud Barak and the Labor Party when the Israeli public wanted a tougher stand against the Palestinians and as a result of the Arab/Israeli minority actively boycotting the election. Sharon refused to negotiate with Arafat and unilaterally moved to consolidate areas around Jerusalem and continued to expand settlements in the West Bank. It was largely under his leadership that the Separation Wall was constructed. In the summer of 2005, Sharon unilaterally led the Gaza withdrawal; the first disengagement since Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.

The major issues which continued to have a daily effect on Israeli and Palestinians included home demolitions, settlement expansion, construction of the Separation Wall, movement restrictions, administrative detention, suicide bombings, rocket attacks, targeted assassinations, inequality before the law, unfair share of state resources and military incursions. [26](#)

## **Hammas**

Hammas was formed in 1987 as a branch of the Islamic Brotherhood in the Palestinian Territories. Its political base was set up in the Gaza Strip where they also utilized foreign donations to set up charitable ventures including the provision of social services, education and religious activities. It remained a resistance movement that had the destruction of Israel as part of its charter. It had heavy involvement with the First Intifada in the years 1987 to 1993. With the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the ruling Fatah Party led by Yasser Arafat supported a two-state solution contrasting sharply with the more militant Hammas. As Fatah faced corruption allegations and an inability to end the occupation, Hammas gained popularity in the West Bank as well. After formally being involved in violent attacks, Hammas is still listed as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and Canada. Co-founders Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abd al Aziz Rantisi were killed in targeted



strikes by Israel in 2004.

Hamas receives funding from Iran, other Arab and Muslim states including Saudi Arabia and from Palestinian expatriates who view the organization as a resistance movement. It carries out some propaganda activity in Western Europe and North America. [27](#)

Hamas, as well as other militant organizations such as Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade have been involved in over 150 suicide bombings since 1993.

Since the beginning of the Second Intifada, over 3,000 Palestinians have been killed largely by Israeli military responses in Gaza and the West Bank. Just under 1,000 Israelis have been killed. Numerous sieges in places like Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, Rafah and the Gaza Strip have killed hundreds. As well, dozens of Arab Israelis have also been killed by Israeli security forces. According to the BBC:

The five years of the Palestinian intifada have cost more than 4,000 lives. Btselem, an Israeli human rights group, has been tracking casualty figures on both sides. Most of the statistics cover the period from 29 September 2000 to 15 September 2005.

#### PALESTINIANS KILLED BY ISRAELIS\*

3,218 killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza including 657 aged under 18

187 killed in extrajudicial executions and 296 (including at least 29 aged under 18) killed in the course of assassination operations. 56 killed by security forces in Israel including one aged under 18

41 killed by Israeli citizens in the West Bank and Gaza including at least three aged under 18

\* There are no figures to show the proportion of Palestinians who were combatants and those who were civilians.

#### ISRAELIS KILLED BY PALESTINIANS

444 civilians killed in Israel including 80 aged under 18

223 civilians killed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip including 37 aged under 18

221 Israeli security forces killed in West Bank and Gaza

84 Israeli security forces killed in Israel

#### PALESTINIANS KILLED BY PALESTINIANS

112 killed by Palestinian civilians on suspicion of collaborating

50 killed by Palestinians in other circumstances

#### FOREIGN CITIZENS

32 foreign citizens (including at least two aged under 18) were killed by Palestinians in Israel

10 foreign citizens were killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza

15 foreign citizens were killed by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Killings by foreign citizens

3 Israeli civilians were killed by foreign citizens (for September 2000 to September

2004)

#### PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL (for September 2000 to September 2004)

13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed in Israel by the Israeli police and border police.  
4 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

#### Killings by Palestinian citizens of Israel (for September 2000 to September 2004)

3 Israeli citizens were killed in Israel by Palestinian citizens of Israel  
1 member of the Israeli security forces was killed in Israel by a Palestinian citizen of Israel

\* The above figures do not include:

Palestinians who died after medical treatment was delayed due to restrictions of movement

Palestinians killed by an explosive device that they set or was on their person

12 Palestinian citizens of Israel killed within Israel by the Israeli police in October 2000

One Jewish Israeli citizen killed within Israel by a Palestinian Israeli citizen in October 2000

Two Jewish Israeli citizens and one member of the Israeli security forces, killed by a Palestinian citizen of Israel in Nahariya in September 2001

Four Palestinian citizens of Israel killed by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) gunfire in the West Bank and Gaza

One Palestinian citizen of Israel killed by Border Police gunfire within Israel in July 2003

Five Palestinian citizens of Israel killed by an absconded IDF soldier on a bus in Shfaram, within Israel, in August 2005 and the shooting soldier, beaten to death by Palestinian citizens of Israel

#### ECONOMIC COSTS

The World Bank reported in 2004 that after almost four years of conflict and Israeli restrictions on movement that disrupt business activity, average Palestinian incomes had dropped by more than one third, and a quarter of the workforce was unemployed.

Nearly one-half of all Palestinians live below the poverty line. More than 600,000 people (16% of the population) cannot afford even the basic necessities for subsistence. [29](#)

Palestinian moderates have argued that both Israeli government policies and corruption by the Fatah Party in the Palestinian Authority created the conditions for Hamas to build beyond its traditional base. According to Ali Abunimah, one of the founders of Electronic Intifada:

In 2003, Israel completed a wall entirely surrounding the city of Qalqilya, which is in the north of the West Bank...They are imprisoned now in a giant Israeli-controlled ghetto. Prior to the wall being completed, Fatah controlled all of the seats in the Qalqilya city council. After the wall was built, in the municipal elections which were held, Hamas won every seat. To me, that's a signal that that vote for Hamas is a sign of people's resistance. It's a sign that they're not willing to submit to Israel's efforts to crush them and imprison them. And that, I think, was reproduced throughout the Occupied Territories. [30](#)

Abunimah remains skeptical of what he calls the "peace process industry" which in his view

takes the attention away from Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1967:

It's easier for the Canadian government, and the European Union and the United States to say, 'we need Palestinian reform, and we need capacity building, and we need state building, and we need to send consultants to help the Palestinians learn this and that, and look how busy we are holding seminars on a free press and democracy...It's a lot easier for Western politicians to do that, than it is to take Israel to the United Nations and impose sanctions on it...The legislative council which was elected has no power. Israel governs the Occupied Territories, not the PA...I don't think that Palestinians in general want to live in an Islamic state...[People support Hamas] because it is the Islamist groups who have expressed the desire for resistance...I'm not in favour of religious politics in general, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, but Hamas has not expressed any intention to do away with the democratic process... They've agreed to abide by the rules of the game, and they should be held to that. [31](#)

After the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, Mahmoud Abbas was elected President in January of 2005. Despite negotiating a ceasefire with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and attempting to rein in militants, it was only partially successful. In the summer of 2005, Ariel Sharon followed through on his commitment to proceed with a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

According Ari Sharit, a writer for the Israeli liberal daily *Haaretz*, in an interview with the *The New Yorker*:

This man has affected the lives of all Israelis and Palestinians, in many episodes over several decades, but I think that, at the end of the day, what was most important was the settlements. In this sense, Arik the Settler is the one who, unfortunately, had more influence than all the others. He changed the reality on the ground in a fundamental way. Ironically, toward the end of his life, he began undoing some of what he did during most of the previous quarter of a century, while still trying to save other parts. The drama of creating the settlements—which I think was a pitiful project and absurd in many ways—and the drama of the undoing are what will remain with us in the years following the Sharon era. This is not history; it is still history in the making, and it will shape our future here in the next decade. [32](#)

### **The Geneva Initiative**

Since the peace process stalled and the Israeli government moved to a course of unilateralism, the architects of the Geneva Initiative worked outside of traditional diplomatic structures but brought some of the same expertise to the table to come up with a proposed final status agreement. Many of the individuals who helped frame the Geneva Initiative were involved in multi-party talks between 1999-2001 and were intimately involved in high level negotiations. [33](#)

What sets the Geneva Initiative apart from the other proposals which have been suggested is that there is more joint Israeli/Palestinian support for the initiative amongst moderates. Many people now concede that public education is one of the most important components of achieving consensus in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. A 2005 poll showed the model agreement to have 64 percent support among Israelis and 54 percent among Palestinians. [34](#)

The West Bank and East Jerusalem are far more complicated when it relates to future withdrawals. The West Bank, also known as Judea and Samaria, has religious significance to some in the Jewish faith. The Gaza withdrawal involved less than 10,000 people. The West Bank settlements have over 240,000 people settled there at present. Daniel Levy, the Policy and International Director of the Geneva Initiative and a former peace negotiator for the Israeli government observes that:

Having proven that withdrawal is possible, further evacuation in the West Bank may be almost inevitable. The other school would point to parallel entrenchment in the West Bank, settlement expansion, construction of the separation barrier, and the financial costs of Gaza relocation and societal trauma it generated, to argue that Gaza first may well be Gaza last. Under this scenario, the viable two-state solution is at best indefinitely postponed, and at worst fatally undermined. [35](#)

Under the Geneva Initiative, 75 percent of Israelis beyond the Green line would be incorporated into Israel's new borders in a land swap with the Palestinians. This would ensure less disruption and have less impact on a fuller withdrawal. There would also be a need for a multi-national force to enforce a final status deal and the European Union may be best positioned to coordinate this effort. [36](#)

Both the Israelis and Palestinians would not be well served by a diplomatic vacuum or a period of polarization in the next few years. The Quartet within the Roadmap to Peace and the European Union unilaterally through its own roundtables and processes can adopt many of the measures sought in the Geneva Initiative as well as pushing both parties to meet international obligations. The economic arrangement provides the best leverage in this regard and tying development funding with reforms has proven to be largely effective in bringing about policy changes over the long term. [37](#)

Levy cites two significant challenges in the short-term:

1. While the world waits for the next pronouncements of Israel's cabinet, new, often devastating, realities are being shaped by bulldozers, builders, and bureaucrats. The construction of the separation barrier, deep inside Palestinian territory in some places, creates a physical as well as mental obstacle for those who believe in and advocate a realistic two-state solution...these facts raise the possibility of a cumulative undermining of the viable two-state solution through settlement expansion that on some day passes the point of no return...either the magic formula for finally freezing settlement construction must be discovered, or the focus needs to be undone for a peaceful solution to prevail.
2. The greatest threat to the two state solution may in fact be the tenuous position of the Palestinian center and its prospective replacement by a leadership that abandons the two-state paradigm (eg. Hamas)...Abbas and his group symbolize reform, democratization, and non-violence, all wrapped up in the most evocative image in the Muslim world today - the Palestinian cause. If this trend loses out to the forces of violence and extremism in Palestine, then the regional and global spill-over effect could be catastrophic. [38](#)

With the election of Hamas in January of 2006 and the upcoming Israeli elections, there may be a brief interregnum in which to re-establish the existing peace processes. Many argue

that if the different parties cannot be brought together in constructive engagement, the likelihood of a Third Intifada in the coming months is very possible. [39](#)

The United States, the European Union and Israel have all called on Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist before further funding would be given to the Palestinian Authority. This may lead to enhanced funding arrangements with neighbouring Arab countries including Iran which would complicate the situation vis-à-vis geo-strategic politics. As well, Hamas would have to reorganize themselves to move from a resistance movement, which utilizes violent tactics and is viewed widely as a terrorist organization, to an organization which can lead a mass non-violent resistance movement in support of a final status agreement for a two-state solution.

As it is presently constituted, Hamas calls for the destruction of Israel in its founding charter. In some respects, Hamas has similarities to Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords.

The Geneva Initiative as the basis of a final status agreement, according to Levy, will require three characteristics to succeed:

1. First, the Israeli public resolves to pursue the permanent status negotiation approach, or the composition of the Israeli government changes and new leaders adopt this position.
2. Second, the Palestinians strategically drive the agenda with big gesture politics, declaring what they are willing to accept in an endgame negotiation (such as an adoption of the Geneva Initiative) and thus dramatically influencing Israeli public opinion.
3. Third, the Quartet puts a detailed permanent status vision on the agenda, thereby cushioning the political climate for Palestinian moderates and discouraging the creation of harmful new facts on the ground. [40](#)

## **Conclusion**

The late Edward Said, a Columbia literature professor and Palestinian supporter, made this observation soon after Oslo Accords were signed:

Arafat and his Palestinian Authority have become a sort of Vichy government for Palestinians. Those of us who fought for Palestine before Oslo fought for a cause that we believed would spur the emergence of a just order. Never has this ideal been further from realization than today. Arafat is corrupt. Hamas and Islamic Jihad are no alternative. And most Palestinian intellectuals have been too anxious to bolster their own case, following Arafat and his lieutenants in the abandonment of their principles and history just to be recognized by the West, to be invited to the Brookings Institution, and to appear on US television...The Israelis have clung to their power and their old policies, the Arabs have capitulated and fawned on their victors without a truce of guts or decency. [41](#)

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is one of the longest running disputes in contemporary international relations. The eruption of the Second Intifada further inflamed the situation

leading to thousands of deaths. The results on the ground showed little cessation of violence, the erection of a Separation Wall and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank despite the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Since the failure of the Camp David Accords, the Roadmap to Peace has been largely unable to move the parties closer together largely due to the polarization of politics during the Second Intifada. With the death of Yasser Arafat, the exit of Ariel Sharon from Israeli politics and the election of Hamas, the international community will be challenged to avert more violence in the short and mid-term.

The European Union, as well as other parties, will need to utilize their economic arrangements with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to meet the stated obligations both nations have committed themselves to under the Roadmap to Peace process and earlier agreements. Beyond the development of civil society in the region, the European Union may need to be involved in the establishment of a multi-national force in the region to help enforce a future final status agreement. Moving this conflict away from the traditional narrative of ethnic, religious and biblical foundations to one based on the modern narratives of the nation-state and international law will be important if a pragmatic final status two-state solution can be negotiated and implemented in a just way.

#### Notes

1 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

2 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 83.

3 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 86

4 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

5 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 91.

6 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

7 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 113.

8 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

9 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 117.

10 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 119.

11 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 118.

12 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

13 Amin, Samir. *Europe and the Arab World*. (New York: Zed Books, 2005), pg. 123.

14 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

15 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)

16 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)



- 17 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)
- 18 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)
- 19 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)
- 20 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)
- 21 European Union web page: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/israel/intro/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/israel/intro/)
- 22 Mossawa Center *Status and Implications Report* - [www.mossawacenter.org](http://www.mossawacenter.org)
- 23 <http://www.policyreview.org/dec04/hanson.html> - excerpt by Dennis Ross
- 24 [www.miftah.org](http://www.miftah.org)
- 25 <http://www.geneva-accord.org/HomePage.aspx?FolderID=11&lang=en>
- 26 <http://www.btselem.org/English/index.asp>
- 27 Council on Foreign Relations - <http://www.cfr.org/publication/8968/#1>
- 29 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3677206.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3677206.stm)
- 30 <http://www.rabble.ca/>
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- 34 Levy, Daniel. *From Geneva to Gaza*. Harvard International Review, Fall 2005, pg. 25.
- 35 Levy, Daniel. *From Geneva to Gaza*. Harvard International Review. Fall 2005. pg. 24- 26.
- 36 Levy, Daniel. *From Geneva to Gaza*. Harvard International Review. Fall 2005. pg, 25.
- 37 Levy, Daniel. *From Geneva to Gaza*. Harvard International Review. Fall 2005, pg. 26.
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- 39 Levy, Daniel. *From Geneva to Gaza*. Harvard International Review. Fall 2005, pg. 25.
- 40 Levy, Daniel. *From Geneva to Gaza*. Harvard International Review. Fall 2005, pg. 27.
- 41 Bayoumi, Moustafa. *The Edward Said Reader*. (New York: Vintage, 2000), pg. 392.

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