

## *The Cycle of Conferences – The Geneva Accord*

### *A Time for Implementation*

The election of Hamas, a fundamentalist organisation with a militant wing, to Palestinian government was yet another shock in the volatile politics of the Middle East. It has come at a critical time in the life of the Israel-Palestinian conflict when hopes for the renewal of negotiations had recently been lifted by Ariel Sharon's resignation from the ruling Likud party ahead of the March 28<sup>th</sup> Israeli elections. Sharon's formation of a new middle path party prompted Yossi Beilin, the leader of the Meretz-Yahad party and a leading architect of the Geneva Accord to say that he would join a Sharon-led coalition government, because the next term is critical for "partitioning the country." Ariel Sharon's subsequent stroke and removal from the political scene has now jeopardised this though. And while the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections is not necessarily a disaster for peace prospects and will certainly put pressure on the organisation to give up its militant activities, there is a danger that Israeli politics will move more to the right and yet further division between the two peoples

As the journalist Jonathan Freedland recently wrote, "all the players in the Middle East conflict are stumbling around, unsure how to negotiate the new terrain. No one knows quite what to do. This stunned paralysis on all sides is down to more than just the shock of the new. It's also a function of the fact that there seem to be no good options, for anybody. Imagine a chess game in which every possible path is blocked: the players stare at their pieces, bite their nails and see only stalemate."

This is not necessarily a negative situation though, for it may bring realisation that the only possible solution is staring everyone in the face. Years of negotiation have made clear to both sides the peace terms that each can and cannot accept, so if peace is genuinely sought, both sides are fully aware of what its outlines must be. There is no need for months of hard work – no need for a fresh plan or formula, for the formula is well known. The majority of the Israeli and Palestinian people are also aware and agreeable to the same peace terms as numerous polls have shown. They are basically along the lines of the four major peace plans that have been widely discussed in recent years: the Clinton bridging proposals of December 2000, the Abdullah Plan of March 2002, the Geneva Accord of December 2003, and the Ayalon-Nusseibeh (or "People's Voice") initiative, also of December 2000. These proposals distil to four key elements as summarised by Stephen Van Evera, professor of political science and associate director of the MIT Center for International Studies:

1. Israel would withdraw from all the territories it occupied in the 1967 war, except for minor border adjustments involving equivalent gains and losses for both sides, in exchange for a full and final peace.
2. Control of the city of Jerusalem would be shared along ethnic lines. Control of its holy places, including the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary area, would also be shared.
3. The West Bank and Gaza would form a Palestinian state that accepted sharp limits on its military forces in order to ensure Israel's security.
4. The Palestinians would not insist on a large return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, instead seeing their right of return recognized mainly by generous compensation to the refugees.

These are the basic proposals that need implementation and upon which peace for the world, not just the Middle East depends. An interesting comment was made in this connection by Al-Faisal, the ambassador of Saudi Arabia: "I think the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the primary cause for most of the unrest and terrorism that takes place in the world today. Just read the literature of all of the terrorist organizations, and you'll find that they use this conflict as an

excuse, not just to commit their acts, but also to recruit supporters and support from all over the world. So it is an issue that has to be resolved for the betterment of the world community.”

Discussing the continuing lack of movement toward a peace process Al-Faisal went on to say, “What has been lacking for 50 years has been implementation of peace solutions.” He pointed to the shuttle diplomacy made famous by Henry Kissinger in the early 1970s, which was “followed by many other initiatives either by the United States or by any other group of countries or single countries. But there has not been implementation... For three years”, he said, “there’s been an Arab initiative on the table and it has not been taken up... The Geneva initiative worked out by Palestinians and Israelis has been on the table, and it hasn’t been implemented. The roadmap itself, which was initiated by the United States and supported by the world community, has not seen any implementation. *What we need is implementation and not more rhetoric.*”

The current crisis and resulting state of tension will manifest sooner or later in a choice of direction either for good or ill. Can the central players be steered towards accepting and implementing the pragmatic wisdom, indeed the plain logic of the four proposals listed above? With the extensive media coverage keeping the Middle East at the forefront of the world mind, all the prayers and meditations taking place around the world can help to focus and direct the steadily mounting invocative pleas for implementation.

Headquarters Group  
Cycle of Conferences

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