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The Role of Regional Actors in the Middle East Peace Process

Part I: The Arab Peace Initiative
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Introduction

At the last annual Arab League Summit, convened in March 2007 in Riyadh, the Arab states reaffirmed the peace initiative they had endorsed five years earlier in Beirut. The Arab Peace Initiative (API), as it is known, demands that Israel withdraw fully from territories seized in the 1967 war and agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It also stipulates that the Palestinian refugee problem should be resolved in accordance with UN Resolution 194, which states that Palestinian refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date. In return, the Arab states will consider the Arab-Israeli conflict to be at an end and relations with Israel will be normalised. The API offers clear advantages for key players in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including Saudi Arabia who first proposed the deal in 2002. For Israel it provides a viable political framework for a resumption of the Arab-Israeli peace process and the normalisation of relations that Israel so craves. For the Palestinians, the API constitutes a crucial contribution to help end the current breakdown in their political system which carries the threat of civil war and would jeopardise any prospects for achieving statehood for some time to come. For Saudi Arabia, the API is a political tool that can be used to curtail Iran's growing political and military power across the Middle East since the invasion of Iraq. This convergence of interest in the API—emanating from different motivations—could create the conditions for a meaningful revival of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

However, for this to happen there are a number of formidable obstacles that must be surmounted. First, Syria must be persuaded to fully support the API. While formally accepting the Plan, Syria has undermined the initiative by continuing to support Hezbollah, hosting Palestinian rejectionist groups, and strengthening its alliance with Iran. Another source of difficulty is Hamas' refusal to meet the three basic requirements of the Quartet—renouncing violence, recognising Israel, and

respecting previously signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA).ⁱ The stipulation that the Palestinian refugee problem be resolved in accordance with UN resolution 194 constitutes yet another problem. This proposed solution is incompatible with Israel remaining a Jewish and democratic state and it is not politically, economically or socially viable to allow all refugees, and their three generations of offspring, into Israel.

This report examines the political implications of the API for three main actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It concludes with recommendations for the international community on how to translate the apparent convergence of interests in supporting the API in to achieving a meaningful Arab-Israeli peace process.

The Arab Peace Initiative: key facts

The current API was introduced by Saudi Arabia at the March 2002 Arab League Summit in Beirut, and was endorsed by all 22 members of the League. In March 2007, at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh, the API was unanimously reaffirmed.ⁱⁱ The initiative makes clear demands of Israel:

- *Territorial demands* - the API calls for 'full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab 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 reference to the Mount Dov Sheeba farms area).
- *Independent Palestinian state* - the initiative calls for 'Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital'.
- *A solution to the Palestinian refugee problem* - the initiative demands 'a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General

Assembly Resolution 194'. This resolution, passed on 11 December 1948, states that 'refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return'.ⁱⁱⁱ The initiative emphasises, however, that 'all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries will be rejected'.

In return, the Arab states will 'consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended' and 'provide security for all states in the region'. The Arab states will, furthermore, 'enter into a peace agreement with Israel', and 'establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace'.^{iv} This comprehensive peace, the API explicitly states, is 'the strategic option for the Arab states'.

The API is the belated antithesis of the "Three Nos" conference—no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations with Israel—of the Arab League held in Khartoum after the 1967 war. In 1967, the Arabs presented a rejectionist front to Israel, whose government decided, one week after the war had ended, to return Sinai to Egypt and to give the Golan Heights to Syria, in exchange for peace. This is the heart of UN Security Resolution 242.^v In 2007, however, the Arab League not only agreed to recognise Israel's existence and its right to live in peace, but expressed a willingness—under the conditions mentioned above—to establish full, normal relations with Israel.^{vi} Thus, the API constitutes the most conciliatory pan-Arab position towards Israel since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, even this more reconciled position leaves a number of key issues unresolved. Firstly, it calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but does not mention whether, and to what extent, the borders of the proposed state could deviate from pre-1967 lines. Secondly, it envisages East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian

state, yet it does not discuss how the holy Jewish, Christian and Muslim sites would be governed. Thirdly, it infers only that it considers all tracks—Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian—as one, but says nothing about implementation. Given its lack of clarity on these critical issues, the API cannot be considered either a peace proposal, or a plan for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. Instead, it should be seen as a broad brush attempt at establishing guidelines for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the proposal should be valued not so much for its content, but rather for its potential to rekindle the peace process. The API's vagueness on the key issues leaves enough latitude for Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese, to sit down and collaboratively sort out their differences. The careful phrasing of the initiative suggests that any agreement thus reached would be regionally rewarded and protected.^{vii}

Israel

The failure of the Oslo process^{viii}, followed by the second Palestinian Intifada and last summer's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, has left Israel with no "Arab-Israeli conflict" political agenda, as the earlier paradigms that shaped its policy have collapsed one by one. Most Israelis concede that the 'Greater Israel' dream is untenable as it undermines the ability of Israel to remain both a Jewish and democratic state, and compromises its international standing. The idea that bi-lateral negotiations with the Palestinians can produce a two-state solution was dealt a severe blow by the collapse of the Oslo peace process, Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, and its armed takeover in June 2007 of the Gaza Strip.

The breakdown of these approaches gave rise to the 'unilateralism' paradigm, which was embraced by the Israeli political centre ground. Underpinning 'unilateralism' was the assumption that, since the Palestinians were unwilling or unable to conclude a peace deal with Israel, the Jewish state had to unilaterally dismantle Jewish settlements and withdraw its

armed forces from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank, in order to extricate itself from the occupation of the Palestinians. Indeed, this was the logic behind Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's withdrawal of troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip in August 2005. The current Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, and his party Kadima, won the May 2006 elections based on their commitment to further withdrawals from the West Bank. However, their election promise has been defeated by the hundreds of Qassam rockets fired by Hamas and Islamic Jihad from the Gaza Strip, and by Hezbollah's shelling of the north of Israel in the summer 2006 Lebanon war. These attacks demonstrated that unilateral withdrawals do not yield political gains, and moreover create grave security risks. Thus, for the foreseeable future at least, it is unlikely that Israel will use unilateral withdrawals to manage the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The collapse of unilateralism has left Israel with no viable political agenda in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Road Map for peace, launched by President Bush in 2003, was never properly adopted.^{ix} The current dialogue between Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, discussed further in the next section, is unlikely to yield any significant results. Given the rising tensions with Syria since last summer's war in Lebanon, Israeli-Syrian negotiations are unlikely to be resumed soon. Thus, Israel faces a familiar and dangerous situation of diplomatic stagnation, which in the past has frequently led to escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and even to full scale war.

The API provides Israel with a solution to the political void, which perhaps explains why Olmert responded to it by referring to its 'positive elements'—hinting that with some refinements it might constitute a platform for negotiations—and inviting 'all the heads of the Arab states to hold talks' with Israel in Jerusalem.^x His positive response was echoed by Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, in a meeting with the representatives of the Arab League Working Group—foreign minister of

Egypt Ahmed Aboul Gheit and his Jordanian counterpart, Abdull Illah Khatib.^{xi} This positive diplomatic momentum must be continued; meaningful dialogue over the API seems to be the only realistic alternative to the steadily rising violence witnessed recently on the Israel-Hamas/Israel-Syria front, which could well lead to full scale confrontation involving Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria and, indirectly, Iran.

Yet there are a number of obstacles to the Israeli government's pursuit of the API. One is resolving the Palestinian refugee problem in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 194. This would inevitably compromise Israel's ability to remain both a Jewish and democratic state, as well as it not being economically viable to allow all refugees and their descendants into Israel. The lack of trust between Israelis and Palestinians poses further obstacles. There has been too much bloodshed, too many breached agreements, and too many unfulfilled diplomatic initiatives over the past seven years. Further pursuit of the API entailing even partial Israeli concessions, will have to overcome the distrust of the Israeli public, military elite and politicians towards their Palestinian counterparts and the Alawi regime in Syria. Another impediment stems from the API's demand that all tracks—Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian—be considered as one. It is unlikely that in the current state of affairs Israel can endure the combined political, military, economic and psychological effects a concurrent move on these fronts would entail.

Last, but not least, are the implications of pursuing the API for the survival of the current government in Israel, which is comprised of parties from across the political spectrum. The parties constituting the right-wing branch of the government, the ultra nationalist Israel Beiteinu, and the ultra religious party, Shas, are emphatically against the API.^{xii} Pursuing the API further, therefore, would most likely lead to their resignation from the governing coalition. The government would then be left 6 seats short of a majority, which would most likely cause the government to collapse and force early elections. Although most Israelis are thought to

favour a two state solution, right wing parties, in particular Likud, are fairing well in the polls. Israelis are concerned with existential threats – Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and an overriding fear of Iran – and Olmert would need to make serious developments in the peace process in order to receive a mandate from the public if the coalition were indeed to collapse and he was forced to go to early elections.

The Palestinians

For the Palestinians the last two years have been a tumultuous period. The evacuation of Jewish settlements in August 2005 brought to an end the Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip. Six months later, in January 2006, the extreme Palestinian Islamic movement, Hamas, formed a government after winning 76 seats in the Palestinian legislative elections as opposed to the 45 won by Fatah, President Mahmoud Abbas' secular movement. The Hamas government refused to accept the three basic conditions set by the Quartet. Following this decision, Israel cut off custom revenues payable to the PA—stemming from its Custom Union with Palestine—and many international donors (including the UK government) suspended direct aid. The situation escalated when Hamas resumed its rocket attacks on the Israeli southern city of Sderot and its surrounding villages. On 25 June 2006, Hamas militants kidnapped Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit from an Israeli border post. This prompted an Israeli military incursion into the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Palestinian domestic politics has been unravelling. In May 2006, fighting broke out in Gaza between Palestinian security forces under the authority of President Abbas and militants loyal to Hamas. Since then, despite the efforts of Palestinian politicians, along with Egyptian and Jordanian officials, to bring about a ceasefire between Hamas and Fatah, Palestinian violence has only increased. In early 2007 the Palestinians were on the verge of civil war, prompting Saudi Arabia to invite Palestinian leaders to a meeting in Mecca in February 2007. The Mecca Summit was attended by Palestinian President Abbas and

Khalid Mashal, Hamas' political leader based in Damascus. The summit produced an agreement to establish a government of national unity, which was unveiled on 15 March 2007 by Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. The optimism that ensued from the Mecca summit's success quickly faded as fighting resumed. Violence reached a peak between 9-13 June 2007 with Hamas' armed takeover of the Gaza Strip, in which 110 Palestinians were killed and over 550 injured.^{xiii} On 14 June, following what was effectively a military coup, President Abbas exercised his executive authority and dissolved the Palestinian national unity government. Promptly thereafter, he established a largely independent emergency government appointing former World Bank economist and Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister. Haniyeh has insisted that his dismissal was unconstitutional. In effect, Palestinian politics is now officially bifurcated, with a combination of Fatah and independent bureaucrats controlling the West Bank and Hamas governing the Gaza Strip - each claiming legitimate rule over the Palestinians. In order to prevent a further escalation of fighting and create the conditions needed for rekindling the peace process, the Palestinians need to be reunited, possibly by restoring the national unity government. The API could contribute by providing a framework for reconciling Fatah's and Hamas' differences over how to deal with Israel and encouraging Hamas to renew the 'hudna' (ceasefire) and accept the Quartets conditions. Since the API coincides with the positions that Fatah has accepted in the past, endorsing this agenda should not present a problem for President Abbas.

As for Hamas, its leadership in the past has recognised the need to negotiate with Israel, if through mediators, on several issues ranging from day-to-day affairs—e.g. transit permits for merchandise and workers, and the transfer of the tax monies that Israel collects for the PA—to political issues such as prisoner exchanges. Its leadership in the past has stated that the movement is not opposed to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under the umbrella of the Arab League, as long as these negotiations do not require Hamas to recognise Israel. Furthermore,

a partial agreement with Israel, serving as a stage in Hamas' strategic goal of 'liberating' Palestine, is acceptable to the movement on condition that it is approved by the Palestinian people.^{xiv} Thus conceivably, Hamas may not object to the Arab League mediating between the organisation and Israel. It is true that Hamas is unlikely to be satisfied with an agreement that recognised Israel and marked the end of the conflict, which is what the API suggests. However, in the face of Arab, Muslim and domestic consensus for a peace agreement, Hamas would find it difficult to actively oppose it and would effectively be compelled to adjust its position. Not doing so would severely dent Hamas' political standing within Palestinian society—as it would be perceived to be acting against the interest of the Palestinian people to end the Israeli occupation—and jeopardise its relations with Arab and Muslim elements in the Middle East and beyond.

Deeper Arab engagement through the API would have another positive effect. By overshadowing internal Palestinian problems, which loom so large in direct, bilateral negotiations with Israel, Arab involvement would compensate for the current weakness of the Palestinian political system. Whereas in their current domestic situation Palestinians cannot, on their own, take any historic decisions, let alone carry them through, they could perhaps do so with the backing and political cover of the entire Arab world.^{xv}

Nevertheless, for the API to be used effectively, the current policy of Israel, the US and most EU member states following Hamas' armed takeover of the Gaza Strip in July must be reviewed. This policy has been to try to strengthen the position of President Abbas by directing money into the West Bank, bolstering Fatah security forces and creating a meaningful Israeli-PLO dialogue. Whilst this has had a short term positive impact for the West Bank Palestinians, in the long term it will not be successful in achieving a peaceful solution. No Palestinian president can retain political legitimacy if his policies *de facto* accept the separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, effectively dividing the Palestinian

territory into two separate entities - and not least President Abbas, who does not have the towering personality or popularity of his predecessor, Yassir Arafat. Another, and perhaps more fundamental problem with the current policy, is that it assumes that Hamas can be excluded from the political process, or defeated altogether. In the current climate, this assessment is misguided. Hamas, despite its failure to govern since being elected, is still a popular movement. It is perceived by many Palestinians as the only alternative to its corrupt predecessors - mainly generating support through its well developed social welfare services network. If marginalised, Hamas will attempt to derail any political process by scaling up violence against Fatah and Israel. Hamas' sponsored violence in the form of horrific suicide bombings, during Oslo, was a key factor in the collapse of the process. Currently, the ability of Hamas to inflict damage is even greater, given the political, financial and military support it receives from Iran and Syria.

Saudi Arabia

When the current API was first launched in March 2002, Saudi-US relations were at a low ebb. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers who had carried out the September 11 attacks were Saudi nationals. In the aftermath, the Saudi Kingdom came under fierce criticism from the American media and political establishment for allegedly nurturing and funding terrorism.^{xvi} Some opinion polls taken in the US in the aftermath of the attacks indicated that the American public was exhibiting growing distrust towards Saudi Arabia.^{xvii} In addition, the Bush administration was disappointed at Saudi Arabia's refusal to support either the campaign in Afghanistan or the planned offensive against the then leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. Against this background, the launch of the API in March 2002 was perceived by some as an attempt by the Saudis to improve their standing in Washington, rather than as a diplomatic initiative to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process.

As a result of the marked improvement in US-Saudi relations since 2002, the 2007 revival of

the API should be considered in a completely different light and viewed in the context of Iran's growing political and military power across the Middle East. Iran has created a strong foothold in Iraq through the provision of finance, training, weapons supply, and political support to Shiia backed militias;^{xviii} Iran is exerting its influence in Lebanon through its powerful proxy, Hezbollah, and through its alliance with Syria; Iran has also established a presence in the Palestinian Territories through the supply of weapons and finance to Hamas in opposition to the international boycott of the organisation. To compound matters further, Iran has been developing nuclear capabilities in defiance of the international community. The threat of a US-led military strike targeting Iran's nuclear installations is a source of deep concern for Saudi Arabia.

The rise in Iran's power and its evident hegemonic aspirations have profound implications for Saudi Arabia, undermining its influence in the region. The prospect of a Shiia crescent, stretching from Iran, through Iraq, to Lebanon threatens the Saudi monarchy, renowned for its anti-Shiia, conservative, Sunni disposition. Iran's appeal to Shiia Muslims across the region also has domestic repercussions for Saudi Arabia, whose population includes a significant Shiia minority. The current war in Iraq has had the notable effect of strengthening Shiite aspirations and Sunni suspicions and generally deepening confessional divisions throughout the kingdom.^{xix} Though sectarian relations in Saudi Arabia are far from approaching boiling point, any external interference aggravating these tensions poses a challenge to the internal stability of Saudi Arabia. In view of these threats, recent attempts to revive the API should be seen as part of Saudi Arabia's efforts to counter Iran's regional ascent. The logic behind this is sound. Iran, faced with an Arab-Israeli dialogue instead of increasing Arab-Israeli violence, would find it difficult to translate its military and financial support to Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas into regional political gains. Thus pro-Western Arab elements, such as Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait, who are adversely

affected by Iran's hegemonic aspirations, are likely to be supportive of the Saudi initiative. The Saudi agenda also fits the interests of the Bush administration in rescuing its diplomatic credentials in the Middle East, which have been so badly dented by the failure of the US to achieve its objectives in Iraq. Brokering an Arab-Israeli breakthrough is the current US administration's last chance of doing this.

Yet can opportunity spring merely from an initiative, backed by the US and sponsored by Saudi-Arabia, which stems from the interest of pro-Western Arab elements in containing Iran? This is a good starting point, but is not sufficient. If the API is to take off properly it must deal with the obstacles in the Israeli and Palestinian arenas discussed earlier in this report. Another hindrance concerns Syria. While formally accepting the API, Syria has undermined the initiative by continuing to support Hezbollah, hosting Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Damascus, and allying itself with Iran. These actions, indicating that Syria only partially supports the API, constrain Saudi Arabia's ability to promote the initiative. The kingdom's standing in the Arab world would be severely damaged if it entered into negotiations with Israel in the face of Syrian opposition—let alone signed a peace treaty—while Israel continued to occupy the Golan Heights. Hence, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will promote the API further unless Syria's support is secured. To prevent this from happening, the US must include Syria in the resumed diplomatic activity surrounding the Arab-Israeli peace process and invite it to the forthcoming November peace conference. There is no guarantee that this will secure Syria's wholehearted support for the API, but, given the alternative—further escalation in violence between Israel and Syria—the chance should not be allowed to slip away.

Conclusion: the way forward – a role for the international community

The API is neither a peace proposal nor a plan for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is a document that provides rough guidelines for how the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict might look, and leaves room for Israel, the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon to negotiate their differences. The opaque phrasing of the API suggests that whatever the sides can agree on will be accepted by the Arab League, with a view to reaching an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As such, the international community should see the API as a potential vehicle for reviving the peace process between Israel and the Arabs. The forthcoming peace conference, set to be hosted by the US in Annapolis at the end of November, offers a valuable opportunity to translate the specific advantages, offered by the API to key players in the Arab-Israeli conflict, into a meaningful and comprehensive peace process. This would benefit the wider region and international community as a whole. To achieve this, however, the API has to overcome formidable obstacles which, if not addressed, will block its success.

- First, the proposed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, in accordance with UN resolution 194, is at total odds with Israel's core aim of remaining a Jewish and democratic state, in addition to not being politically, socially and economically viable.
- Second, the fighting between Hamas and Fatah has plunged the Palestinian political system into a deep crisis, exacerbated by the current policies of Israel, the US, and most EU member states, to bolster Fatah in the West Bank. As long as this political crisis continues the Palestinians will not be able to agree on any of the historic decisions required by the API, let alone implement them.
- Third, so far Syria's full support for the API has not been secured, which in turn constrains Saudi Arabia's ability to promote the initiative. The latter's standing in the Arab world would be severely damaged were it to

enter into negotiations with Israel without Syria's support—let alone sign a peace treaty—while Israel is still occupying the Golan Heights. Thus, Saudi-Arabia is unlikely to take any further steps unless Syria's support is ensured.

In light of these obstacles, the international community - including the UK government - should take the lead in promoting specific measures aimed at overcoming these challenges. In doing so they will create the conditions in which Israel and the Arabs could use the API as a basis for resuming peace negotiations during, or after, the forthcoming Annapolis peace conference:

- On the issue of the solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, the UK government should encourage the authors of the API to adopt a more flexible terminology, rather than clinging to the outdated and unviable solution stipulated by UN resolution 194. The API, although implicitly, does leave room for Israel and the Palestinians to settle between themselves the future of Jerusalem and the borders of the Palestinian state. Israel would only be able to endorse the API if similar flexible terminology was adopted on the issue of refugees, allowing for Israel and the Palestinians to negotiate the matter between themselves, rather than be restricted by the API's current rigid stipulation on the refugee issue.
- On the issue of the Palestinian political crisis, the UK government should encourage the Palestinians to resume efforts to restore a ceasefire (*hudna*) with Israel, and get Hamas to accept the Quartet conditions by endorsing a revised version of the API. Hamas' statements and actions in the past indicate that it might be willing to do so, providing a solution to the current political impasse of Palestinian factionalism, which is not only tearing Palestinians apart but also undermining the prospects for achieving statehood and peace.
- On the issue of gaining the support of Syria, the UK government should encourage the

Bush administration to include Syria in the forthcoming November peace conference. The Bush administration's current stance of shunning Syria will serve merely to reinforce Syria's relationship with Iran and its regional allies, distancing it even further from the API.

The UK government and the international community has a significant role in facilitating talks between Israel and the Arab states by creating the conditions in which such talks are most likely to prove fruitful. By pursuing the measures outlined above, the UK government would greatly enhance the possibility of translating the advantages offered by the API to key players in the Arab-Israeli conflict—during or after the Annapolis talks—into a meaningful peace process. For Israel, the API is currently the only viable political framework for achieving normalisation with the Arab world. For the Palestinians, the API constitutes a key part of the solution to their deepening political crisis. For Saudi Arabia and the international community more broadly, the API provides an opportunity to reverse the adversarial effects of the regional ascent of Iran. Thus, a modified API, supported by Israel and the Arabs, seems at present the most politically viable alternative to further violence in the Middle East, particularly given the failure of past diplomatic initiatives—e.g. the Oslo peace process and the Road Map for Peace. There are no guarantees that a modified API would prove effective in jumpstarting the Arab-Israeli peace process, even were the recommendations set out above to be implemented. However, it presents an opportunity that the international community can not afford to miss.

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i The Quartet is a foursome including the UN, US, the EU and the Russian federation involved in mediating the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

ii For the full text of the Arab Initiative see <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm>, as viewed on 18 September 2007.

iii UN general assembly resolution 194, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/043/65/IMG/NR004365.pdf?OpenElement>, as viewed on UN website on 6 September 2007.

iv For the full text see the Arab League's website, <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm>, as viewed on 2 September 2007.

v Oren, Amir, 'Good Morning Abdullah', <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=146020&contrassID=3&subContrassID=0&sbSubContrassID=0>, as viewed on 3 September 2007.

vi The actual Arabic word for normalization (tatbih) was not used, for it carries with it negative political connotations in the political terminology associated with the Arab Israeli conflict.

vii Agha, Hussein, Malley, Robert, 'The Road from Mecca' in *New-York Review of Books*, no. 8, May 10, 2007. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/20176>. As viewed on 3 September 2007.

viii The Oslo process began in 1992 with track two diplomacy meetings between top Israeli and PLO officials. These meetings led to Israel and the PLO recognizing each other formally in 1993, enabling peace negotiations between the two sides, which produced two further interim agreements between Israel and the PLO. However, by the mid 1990s the Oslo process was faced numerous obstacles which led to its final collapse in the 2000 Camp David summit between the then Israeli prime-minister Ehud Barak, Palestinian Chairman Yassir Arafat, and US president Bill Clinton. Reportedly, the PLO rejected an Israeli offer to establish a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with parts of East Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of 150000 Palestinian refugees to areas under Israeli sovereignty in addition to those that would return to the Palestinian state. In return, the PLO was required to declare the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be at an end.

ix For a summary of the 'road map' see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/20062.htm>, as viewed on 2 September 2007.

x Benn, Aluf, 'The Peace Process / Only Saudi Arabia can do it', *Haaretz* 12 March, 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/835891.html>, as viewed on 11 September 2007. Kershner, Isabel, 'Olmert invites Arab leaders to hold talks' in *International Herald Tribune*, 2 April 2007.

xi Arab League Envoys Hold Talks in Israel, *Washington Post*, Thursday July 26, 2007. See *Washington post web-site* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/25/AR2007072500364.html>, as viewed on 8/9/07.

xii Eli Yishai, Shas' leader, stated that Shas will quit government if the prime-minister gives up parts of Jerusalem to the Palestinians see, 'Yishai: Shas will quit gov't if Temple Mount is relinquished' *Haaretz Web-site*, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/903153.html>, as viewed on 11 September 2007.

xiii For these numbers see *International Crises Group*, 'After Gaza', 2 August 2007.

xiv Hamas' foreign minister, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, gave expression to these views in interviews he gave to the Israeli liberal daily, *Haaretz*, on February 5 and April 27 2006. Quoted in Klein, Menachem, 'Hamas in Power', in *Middle East Journal*, vol. 61 no.3, 2007, pp. 443-444.

xv Agha and Malley, 'The Road From Mecca'.

xvi See 'Bush to hear Saudi Israel warning' on *BBC website*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1949736.stm, as viewed on 13 September 2007.

xvii For instance, one opinion poll suggested that 59 percent of US citizens believed that Saudi Arabia "supports terrorism," while only 19 percent say they have confidence in Saudi Arabia as a reliable ally in the War on Terror. See *Harvard International Reviewed Web site* <http://hir.harvard.edu/articles/1409/>, as viewed on 13 September 2007.

xviii See Tran, Mark, 'Iran accused over attack on US Iraq base', *Guardian Website*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,,2168318,00.html>, as viewed on 13 September 2007.

xix *International Crises Group*, 'The Shiite Question in Saudi-Arabia', 19 September 2005.