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**Research paper**

***REVISITING THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE IN ORDER  
TO NORMALISE THE ISRAELI - PALESTINE RELATIONS***

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## Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has prevailed over more than half a century. The severity fluctuates with new strategies continuing to be implemented and forsaken, nonetheless a consensus is far from being reached, with the root of the conflict becoming invincible and untraceable over the decades. It may seem that the direct involvement of the international community has only exacerbated the friction between Israel and Palestine, giving a united Arab proposition perhaps more credibility at least. In spite of the fact that all Arab League member states have signed in approval of the Saudi-proposed initiative, the Arab world and, gravely Palestine itself, remains divided on what should actually be done to resolve this situation. It is ludicrous to expect the details of exact border coordinates, frankly needed in order to move forward with the Two State Solution, to be drafted, when Palestine does not even have a united governing body. The Arab Peace Initiative may work in theory, but practical steps ought to be proposed by the Arab League, to not only normalise the relations between Palestine and Israel but within Palestine herself, in order to get out of the deadlock that has been strangling the Middle East since the beginning of the last century.

## Definition of Key Terms

**The Right of Return** - an internationally recognised right; the principle that all first-generation Palestinian refugees and their descendants have the right to return to the land that they were forced to flee due to the events that took place in 1948 and 1967.

**Settlements** - residential areas built on occupied land by the Israelis, internationally considered illegal according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of populations onto occupied territories. Israel rejects this claim, as settlements continue to blur the lines between Israel and Palestine.

**One State Solution** - The solution being the consolidation of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza into one state. If it were to be democratic, Palestinians would be the majority and thus a Jewish state would cease to exist.

**Two State Solution** - The solution being the creation of the separate sovereign states of Palestine and Israel.

## Major Parties Involved

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia has figured as the key Arab player in normalising the relations between the Arab world and Israel, most notably by bringing forth the Arab Peace Initiative. Israel recognises the Saudi religious and economic leverage, seeing that Saudi Arabia has the power to ensure Israel the legitimacy it demands from the Arab world in their hands, being in a unspoken, respected leader position as it holds the most sacred Muslim religious site and endless oil reserves.

### **Hamas**

Hamas is a Palestinian Sunni fundamentalist organisation holding power over the Gaza Strip ever since the democratic elections in 2006. It is considered to be a terrorist organisation by several non-Arab states or organisations, including Israel. Hamas was founded with the intention to liberate Palestine by any means necessary and establish an Islamic state on the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the internationally recognised and sovereign land of Israel. Condemned by the majority of the Arab world, Qatar and Turkey remain to be its strong political and financial suppliers, neglecting to recognise the crimes against humanity carried out against civilians during the Hamas military offensives.

### **The Palestinian Islamic Jihad**

With similar intentions and practices, The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine has figured as an organisation, by many labelled as terrorist, seeking the creation of a sovereign Islamic state of Palestine alongside Hamas. PIJ is largely funded by Iran and its powers continue to increase in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

## **The Palestinian Liberation Organisation**

PLO is the national representative of Palestinian people controlled by the ruling political party Fatah. PLO runs the government across the Palestinian territory except for Gaza, which is under the rule of the opposing Hamas. Currently chaired by Mahmoud Abbas, the PLO has managed to grant Palestine an observer status in the United Nations, as the endless attempts at peace talks fail to be fruitful.

## **General Overview of the Issue**

The Arab Peace initiative was first introduced by Saudi Arabia in the 2002 Summit in Beirut by the Crown Prince Abdullah and it was signed unanimously by all the Arab League member states. It states that if Israel asserts peace to be its sole strategic option and willingly withdraws completely from the occupied territories, the entire Arab world will consider the ongoing conflict to be ultimately over and the Arab-Israeli relations will be normalised. The demands seem to be simple. Israel withdraws from all the territories it has occupied since the Six Day War in 1967, giving up the West Bank and Gaza Strip, allowing Palestine to take East Jerusalem as its capital. The question of the 7 million Palestinian refugees will be answered according to the UN General Assembly Resolution 194, stating: *"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 and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible."* (Article 11). In return, the Arab World will finally stop seeing Israel as the enemy, as it has done for the better half of the last century and up to this day.

As a response, the military wing of Hamas has conducted the Passover Massacre to send the message that Palestine is willing to fight for its freedom by any means deemed necessary by Gaza's ruling body. PLO had condemned the atrocities, but they could not save the Initiative announced mere hours beforehand from being faltered. With overall very bipolar responses, the Initiative remained dormant until it was re-introduced in 2007.

The re-introduction of the unchanged proposal has yet again witnessed the dispute between Hamas and PLO, as the Hamas representative was the only present Arab League member to obtain from voting in favour of the proposal. The dispute between Hamas and Fatah behind the PLO has erupted in to a civil war the same year, the reconciliation process is still currently in process a decade later. In essence, the two parties are determined to reach the same goal by different means - while Fatah

has affirmed to refrain from using violence in lieu of peaceful negotiation, it still remains to be the main strategy of Hamas. The fact that there is not a united, unanimous voice behind the State of Palestine repeals any credibility the so-called State might have and consequentially gives Israel the moral high ground to discount any Palestinian appeals.

## Timeline of Key Events

1948 - The Arab-Israeli War - The Arab league intervenes on behalf of the Palestinian Arabs following the declaration of a sovereign Israel. Israeli militia defeat the Arab forces and 700 000 Palestinians become refugees.

1967 - Six Day War - Israel takes power over the West Bank and East Jerusalem

1987 - First Palestinian uprising

1993 - Oslo Accords

2002 - Arab League Adopts the Saudi Peace Initiative in the Middle East

2007 - The Initiative is re-introduced, civil war between Hamas and Fatah

2012 - United Nations Votes to Accept Palestine as a Non-Member Observer State

2017 - President Trump Recognises Jerusalem as Israel's Capital, Orders US Embassy to Move

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### **The Oslo Accords of 1993**

The Oslo Accords are the first US mediated peace agreements between Israel and the PLO. Laying down a “peace for land” formula, the Oslo Accords propose a solution granting Palestine Gaza and the West Bank, considering any attacks on Israeli targets will permanently stop - Palestine demanded the settlements to withdraw from its land and called for means that would secure its financial situation, while Israel was most concerned with safety precautions, weary of the casualties Hamas and PJI have committed on Israeli civilians. The Oslo Accords are widely considered to be the cornerstone of the peace process, as they legitimised the Palestinian government and laid out a 5 year reconciliation plan that both parties could agree to, in theory. However, major mistrust between the two parties has hampered the plan from working in practice, as Israel had come to the conclusion that the ruptured Palestine was not doing enough to stop the terror and pursuing the Accords would only fuel the enemy.

## Questions a resolution should consider

1. The unification of Hamas and Fatah
2. The stance of a unified Palestine
3. The question of the several terrorist organisations operating in the area under the name of Palestine
4. The support of terrorist organisations and other governmental bodies that hinder the peace process by Arab League Member states
5. The question of Jerusalem
6. The question of the 7 million Palestinian refugees

## Appendix

### Current political map of Israel and the Gaza Strip



### The 2002 Arab Peace Agreement

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