

REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

Cumulative Impact Case Study

Much Process but No Peace:
Israel-Palestine, 1993-2008

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Isabella Jean and Everett Mendelsohn

This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.

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I. Background on the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Project and Cumulative Impact Case Studies

From 1999 through early 2003, RPP engaged over two hundred agencies and many individuals who work on conflict around the world in a collaborative effort to learn how to improve the effectiveness of peace practice. The agencies included international peace and conflict resolution NGOs, some intergovernmental organisations, as well as local organizations and groups working for peace in their countries. RPP conducted 26 case studies, and consulted with over 200 agencies and over 1,000 people to analyze peacebuilding experience. The findings of three years of analysis and consultation are presented in *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*¹, which reviews recent peace practice, assesses elements that have been successful (or not) and why, and points to learning on how to improve effectiveness.

The evidence gathered by RPP suggests that although many people do, indeed, work at many levels, conducting good programs at each level, these initiatives do not automatically “add up” to peace! RPP found that peace programs that were effective in contributing to Peace Writ Large addressed key factors driving the conflict; many programs, however, did not relate their objectives to the driving forces of conflict, and consequently had little impact on the overall situation. Often, programs that had powerful impacts on participants’ attitudes and relationships did not lead to activity or changes that affected a broader constituency of people, and programs working at the grassroots level were often not linked with programs at the elite level. Good programs had impact on the local situation, only to see this undermined by national regional developments.

- While RPP’s findings to date have pointed to many factors that have *prevented* programs from “adding up” to have an impact on the overall conflict situation, they have yielded less evidence on what contributes to the “adding up” process. Key questions remaining include:
- How do multiple different peace efforts have cumulative impacts on a situation? What elements and/or processes determine whether there is a positive cumulative impact of multiple programs, reinforcing what others are doing, as well as responding to changes in circumstances?
- How can we link micro (“peace writ little”) and macro (“Peace Writ Large”) levels in programming decisions in order to improve the impacts on the broader peace?

RPP is addressing these questions in new series of case studies regarding contexts in which there has been progress towards peace, in some cases sustained and in others not. These cases look specifically at whether and how multiple peace efforts have cumulative positive impacts at particular moments, and how activities and successes at the community or local level and at the national level can be linked to provide sustainable changes and momentum toward peace.

¹ M.Anderson & L. Olson, *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2003). Available at <http://www.cdainc.com/rpp/publications/confrontingwar/ConfrontingWar.pdf>

II. Methodology

In order to assess the cumulative impact of peace-making and peacebuilding efforts in Israel and Palestine, case authors conducted interviews with a range of people involved in different aspects of Israeli and Palestinian societies and in the peace efforts that have taken place over the last two decades. Beginning in May 2008, one of us interviewed individuals in the U.S., including four located in Washington, D.C. and another four in Cambridge, MA. During our joint visit to Israel and Palestine in June 2008, we talked with another 35 people and finally met with a dozen additional Israelis and Palestinians in October 2008 when one of us returned for further work in the Middle East. In total, we held conversations with 55 people.

We selected and approached many interviewees through an extensive network of contacts that one of the case writers, Everett Mendelsohn, has built up after years of engaging with people on both sides of the conflict. Many of the people we spoke to are people he has known for a decade or more, while others were recommended by his personal contacts. We approached other interviewees through contacts that CDA, and specifically the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project had on the ground. Respondents included individuals who were directly involved in official negotiations, civil society leaders who initiated and led peacebuilding and dialogue efforts, academics and researchers who dedicated their careers to analyzing and writing about the conflict, former Israeli Cabinet members and PLO representatives, as well as third-party observers. Most of the people we spoke with dedicated a significant part of their professional careers to the process of resolving differences, bringing the two sides closer together and searching for a lasting solution.

Our interviews, many of which took the form of informal conversations, did not follow a structured questionnaire. The case authors shared the purpose behind the cumulative case study and started each interview by posing several overarching questions regarding past and present peace efforts carried out at various levels as well as about the setbacks that have so far prevented the final agreement from taking place. We let our interlocutors define the issues that they wanted to focus on. In addition to sharing their insights about the contributions of peacebuilding efforts and key actors, many interviewees shared their reflections about the prospects for peace as they saw them at the time of the conversation. People were extraordinarily straightforward and honest in their reflections and analyses. We do not attribute the comments referenced in this case to specific individuals but some of the names of the organizations that we visited or those that were mentioned in the comments have been left in the text since they are well known and easily recognizable.

Limitations

The insecure situation in the Gaza Strip and the constraints placed on cross-border travel prevented us from visiting organizations and individuals based there. The conversations held in the West Bank were also limited in scope due to the short period of time that we had for travel within the West Bank. Therefore, only interviews in Ramallah and near Bethlehem were possible at the time of the field visit. However, some of the people we arranged to meet in Jerusalem also work in Nablus, Hebron and other parts of the West Bank.

Other sensitivities had to be taken into account including issues of personal safety, trust and anonymity. The choice of location for an interview in Jerusalem (selecting meeting places in

East Jerusalem versus in West Jerusalem) was important in order to assure that our interlocutors would be willing to meet and talk at ease. Finally, several key people we planned to meet were unavailable due to out-of-country travel and other commitments. Consequently, additional conversations took place at a later stage in the fall of 2008.

III. Introduction

The headline of a 2008 *New York Times* editorial seemed to say it all, “Talk but No Peace.”² A *Jerusalem Post* opinion piece by Aaron David Miller, a long time adviser on the Middle East to Democratic and Republican Presidents, was headlined, “An Israeli-Palestinian agreement: Forget about it.” Miller argued that “cease fires, informal cooperation and temporary arrangements may still be possible,” but “a conflict-ending agreement between Israelis and Palestinians may no longer be possible.”³ In an article published in May 2008, Nathan Brown directly posed the question now heard on many fronts, “Sunset of the Two-State Solution?”⁴ Daniel Levy, a very active Anglo-Israeli who has been deeply involved in peace talks at the non-governmental and Track II level, similarly headlined a recent column, “Oslo at 15 years – a vanishing dream.” His assessment is gloomy: “The latest incarnation of Oslo, the Annapolis effort, is sputtering toward another unrealized peace deadline, the end of ’08.”⁵

The question stands in front of us: Why since the optimistic days following the formal signing of the Oslo Accords on the lawn of the White House, September 13, 1993, when President Bill Clinton witnessed Israeli Prime Minister Rabin somewhat hesitantly shake the hand of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, has so little actual progress been made in achieving an Israeli-Palestine peace agreement? Our own recent look at the activities of non-governmental organizations and individuals working on issues of peace has to be understood in the context of the efforts that have been made since the signing at Oslo Accords fifteen years ago, efforts which have not yielded the fruits of peace. It is fair to say that the last half decade has seen a deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations even though there have been numerous attempts at “peace-making.”

Although few by comparison to the number of Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental peace and conflict-oriented groups established since 1993, a steady stream of initiatives at peace-making and reconciliation had been undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s. Everett Mendelsohn reviewed these efforts in an earlier case study for the Reflecting on Peace Practice project.⁶ These efforts were not successful at making peace, although they did create an increasing cadre of individuals, both Palestinian and Israeli, who had come to know each other and had become

² “Talk But No Peace.” Editorial. *New York Times*, March 8, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/08/opinion/08sat1.html>

³ A. D. Miller, “An Israeli-Palestinian agreement: Forget about it.” *Jerusalem Post*, November 24, 2008: 14. Available at <http://www.jpost.com/Cooperations/Archives/>.

⁴ N. Brown, “Sunset of the Two-State Solution?” *Foreign Policy for the New President* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008). http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/pb58_brown_sunset_final.pdf

⁵ D. Levy, “Oslo at 15 Years—A Vanishing Dream.” *News and Observer*, September 29, 2008. Available at <http://www.tcf.org/list.asp?type=NC&pubid=2060>.

⁶ E. Mendelsohn, “The Peacemakers: NGO Efforts in the Middle East, 1948-2001” (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2001). Available on CDA’s website at http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/casestudy/rpp_mideast_case_study_set_1_Pdf.pdf

familiar with the discourse of peacemaking. The critical break came in 1991 at the end of the Gulf War, when the U.S. and Russia convened an international conference in Madrid with the aim of establishing a formal Israeli-Palestinian peace process, backed by the Arab states. Its slow pace and lack of success was a key factor behind the efforts to launch the secret talks at Oslo.

The major formal and substantial civil society level attempts at joint peacemaking during the fifteen years after the Oslo Accords of 1993 are impressive in number, scale and in several cases in detail. Many observers have commented that all the dimensions now exist for completing a treaty. What is missing has been the political will and ability to bridge the divergent political interests on the domestic front. However, judging from the opening comments in this paper, a negotiated peace seems as far away as ever as we examine the record of these visible efforts. We have to admit that the overall mood we encountered during our interviews was quite pessimistic.

IV. Overview of Official Peace-making Efforts since 1993

Conducting a literature review on the Israeli and Palestinian conflict and peace efforts is a daunting task given the massive quantity of literature that exists on the subject. The case authors consulted a few key resources, such as the publication by the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, “Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.”⁷ In our outline of the official peace-making efforts, we drew on the extensive and in-depth knowledge of the peace process of case writer Everett Mendelsohn, who has traveled to the region every year since 1968 and has been involved in several prominent Track II initiatives. We do not present an analysis of these peace-making attempts here, but rather provide this broad overview as a backdrop to which many people referred to during our field visit. In the subsequent sections, we present people’s comments and analyses regarding positive turning points (or lack thereof) and setbacks to peace.

Oslo Accord and Subsequent Agreements

Oslo was initiated in 1993 by two Israeli academics, Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, who were outside the circles of government and political influence, with the help of Terje Rød-Larsen (a Norwegian peace think tank leader). Their efforts quickly metamorphosed, with the help of Norwegian government officials, through Track II talks to secret governmental level negotiations (albeit the Palestinian side, the PLO, was a non-government, liberation movement). Much has been written about the Oslo Accords, what they achieved, and what they failed to achieve and will not be reviewed here. The structure of the agreements, formally called the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self Government Arrangements, delayed dealing with the hard questions (Jerusalem, refugees, borders, security), leaving them for future negotiations. The working assumption was that incremental steps would build confidence between the two sides and allow fairly rapid movement toward a formal peace treaty. The widely held expectation was that many of those steps would be taken by civil society groups, academics and peace activists, as well as through official level negotiation and agreements. This did not happen. The assassination of

⁷ E. Kaufman, W. Salem & J. Verhoeven, *Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

Prime Minister Rabin in 1995 and the election shortly thereafter of Binyamin Netanyahu, a staunch opponent of the Accords, further weakened chances for their success.

The Oslo accords had as their tacit, noteworthy, assumption that there would be two states, Israel and Palestine, in the area of the former Mandate Territory of Palestine from which the British withdrew in 1948. The UN partition plan of 1947 had proposed a division of the land: 53% to the Jews, 46% to the Palestinians and 1% for an international zone, including Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Arab states' rejection of the plan and the ensuing war, which ended in a truce (not a peace agreement), left Israel with 78% of the land and the Palestinians with 22% in the West Bank controlled by Jordan and the Gaza strip controlled by Egypt.⁸ Israel's capture of all of Palestine (as well as the Sinai from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria) in the 1967 war changed expectations, and at Oslo in 1993, the Palestinians were looking at a potential state limited to the 22% of the territory that Israel had held since 1967. Thus, from the Palestinians' perspective, they had already conceded a good deal of territory. A new perspective, however, had arisen in Israel, created by the many settlements that Israelis had established in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. By 1993, the number of settlers totaled 111,600 in the West Bank, 152,800 in East Jerusalem and 4,800 in Gaza.⁹

At the governmental level, the Oslo process inched ahead. In May 1994, the Cairo Agreement granted limited self-rule to the Palestinians in Jericho and 60% of Gaza; Arafat and the Palestinian Authority moved to Gaza. The so-called Oslo II agreement in 1995 laid out a schedule for Israeli withdrawal from six additional West Bank cities and 400 villages, to be completed in 1996. Palestinian elections were held, Arafat became President of the Palestinian Authority and a Legislative Council was elected. In 1997, the new Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu signed the Hebron Agreement committing Israel to withdraw from 80% of the city of Hebron, leaving 20% of it in the hands of Israeli settlers. In 1998, reluctantly acting under strong U.S. pressure Prime Minister Netanyahu signed the Wye River Memorandum outlining further Israeli withdrawals from West Bank territory.¹⁰ The agreement was suspended almost immediately when the Netanyahu government collapsed and Israel went to elections, which were won by Labor Party leader Ehud Barak. The Memorandum subsequently was revised and with it, the "peace process" was revived.

Nonetheless, the hoped for final status talks, outlined in the Oslo Accords, were stalled. At a meeting held in 1999 in Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, participants outlined yet another attempt in a Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. One need only read the titles and texts of these memoranda and agreements to realize that the Oslo Israeli-Palestinian peace-making process was in trouble; major deadlines had been missed. It is in this context that Israeli Prime Minister

⁸ Resolution Adopted on the Report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Palestinian Question (Plan of Partition with Economic Union), UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (II), 29 November 1947. Available at <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/8975841.40300751.html>

⁹ Foundation for Middle East Peace, "Israeli Settler Population 1972-2006," http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info/settlement-info-and-tables/stats-data/israeli-settler-population-1972-2006 (accessed June 10, 2010).

¹⁰ The Israel Project for Freedom, Security and Peace. "Timeline of Israeli-Arab Peace Initiatives since 1977" (Washington, DC and Jerusalem: TIP, 22 February 2008). Available at <http://www.theisraelproject.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=hsJPKOPIJpH&b=3918015&ct=5054583>

Barak, in 2000, launched two major negotiating initiatives, the first with Syria and the second with the Palestinians. Both failed.

Camp David II (2000)

The breakdown of the Camp David II talks has been analyzed and re-analyzed by participants and outside observers in numerous books and articles. One of the present authors, Mendelsohn, undertook the task of bringing together the reports of two teams, one Palestinian and one Israeli (each of which included several participants in the original negotiations) who had been meeting separately, beginning in 2001, to analyze the failure and seek any lessons to be learned.¹¹

Mendelsohn opened the paper with remarks from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's memoir, *Madame Secretary*: "I spent fifteen days there, locked in with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. We worked day and night and night and day...After arguing so long with men from three cultures, about the Middle East, when I left at last, I didn't care if I never went back."¹² Albright identified a number of pre-summit issues that contributed to the failure of the negotiations:

- Ehud Barak's turn to Syrian negotiations instead of the Palestinian track shortly after taking office in May, 1999, and his subsequent demands that Arafat speed up the negotiation process when the Syrian track failed in March 2000;
- Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon under Barak, without a negotiated agreement, set a precedent on the terms for Israel's return of territory;
- Barak's distaste for the step by step approach of the Oslo Accords (he had opposed them in 1993) and his postponing of the Wye summit commitments made by his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu for further Israeli withdrawal from West Bank lands;
- Barak's allowing for substantial continued expansion of Israeli settlements following his election;
- Barak's strong pressure on President Clinton (at the very end of his term in office) to call a summit conference believing that the "pressure cooker" environment would push Arafat to an agreement;
- Clinton's tight time constraint – having to leave the Summit for an international G-8 meeting in Japan after just eight days, as well as recognizing the politics of the upcoming U.S. elections;
- Arafat's reluctance to attend a summit, having become angry at Barak and believing that the gap between the two sides was still too great for a quick agreement and that more time was needed. While he ultimately accepted Clinton's invitation Arafat's psychology was negative and would have had to change for the summit to work.¹³

¹¹ E. Mendelsohn, "Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations: 1999-2001 – What Makes for Success and Failure?" Unpublished Manuscript. Available by request from the author.

¹² M. Albright, *Madame Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion, 2003), quoted in Mendelsohn, "Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations: 1999-2001," p. 613.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 612-616.

The Secretary believed that Arafat had not done “anything” to prepare the Palestinians for hard choices, while she felt Barak publicly had hinted at broad concessions, outraging his opponents, but helping Israelis understand that painful concessions would be necessary.¹⁴

Despite the failure of the summit, Barak’s insistence that all the potential offers be taken “off the table” and the start of the second Palestinian *intifada* in September 2000, there were two additional steps at the official level that left a fairly full set of ideas of what a peace agreement would include. After hesitating for several months, in late December 2000, President Bill Clinton called together a group of the summit participants at the White House, where he shared a set of parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace agreement. With this document in hand, a group, including some of the original Camp David teams, plus some additional Israeli and Palestinian delegates, met at the Egyptian resort of Taba in January 2001 and set out to delineate in greater detail what a treaty would include. The meeting ended with no official document, and Israel went into elections. However, the European Union Observer, Ambassador Miguel Angel Moratinos, took very full notes. These were circulated as the “non-paper” shortly after the meetings and have become an unofficial account of the detailed talks among the official representatives of Israel and Palestine. The U.S. was not represented at Taba, as the new administration of President George W. Bush had put the Clinton proposals and the Israeli Palestinian conflict at arm’s length.

The Quartet and Annapolis Peace Process (2001 – 2008)

Two other official steps involving the U.S. were taken since 2001 to influence the peace process. The first was the Middle East Quartet, which met first in Madrid in 2002, and included formal representation from the U.S., the UN, the European Union, and Russia. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, was the coordinator. The objective was to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and reduce the increased violence which had continued since the beginning of the second *intifada*. In April 2003, the Quartet brought forward a “Performance-Based Roadmap to a Two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” It envisaged a phased process ending in “a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005.”¹⁵

The second step was a meeting addressed by President Bush in November 2007 at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. The session, a further effort to re-invigorate Israeli-Palestinian negotiating efforts, was attended by President Bush and the other Quartet leaders as well as the Palestinian and Israeli leaders. The Annapolis meeting was notable, as it was the first time the Israelis formally accepted the two-state solution as their objective. Intense Israeli-Palestinian talks resumed at the highest level. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice paid regular visits to Israel and Palestine to prod the several layers of negotiations. As this paper is being written, the talks have all but come to a close with recognition that an agreement is not at hand. The U.S. elected Barack Obama as the next President to take office in January 2009, and the Israelis go to new elections in February 2009 following the resignation of their Prime Minister, who is fighting corruption charges. The Palestinians are still debating whether they will

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 614.

¹⁵ “A Performance-Based Roadmap to a Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” 30 April 2003, para. 1. Available at <http://www.un.org/media/main/roadmap122002.html>.

have elections in 2009, with their polity badly split between Hamas having seized control of Gaza after winning an election in 2006 while the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority holds control of the West Bank.

Arab Peace Plan (2002 and 2007)

There was one other official step, which involved neither the Quartet nor the Palestinians and Israelis. In 2002, Saudi Arabia brought to the Arab League summit in Beirut an Arab Peace Plan which was adopted by all twenty-two members of the Arab League. Its core principles represented a dramatic shift: full Arab recognition of Israel in return for a peace agreement adopted by the Israeli and Palestinians. The text was approved again by the full Arab League in 2007 and in November 2008, the Hebrew translation of the text was published as an advertisement by the Palestinian Authority in the four major Israeli newspapers. While initially ignored or brushed aside by the Israelis, and largely ignored by the U.S., the proposal was partially resurrected in 2009 and praised by several senior Israel political figures, including President Shimon Peres providing a possible way forward.

V. Unofficial Peacebuilding Efforts since 2001

This section consists of information gathered both through desk research and from the interviews conducted during the field visit. In asking respondents to describe the peacebuilding efforts undertaken in Israel and Palestine over time, we also sought their analysis of the turning points and other developments resulting from them. The list is not comprehensive and does not catalogue every effort nor does it attempt to assess the results of every initiative. Rather, we provide a broad overview of the different types of efforts undertaken and present the perspectives of the people we spoke with, where applicable. Several interviewees highlighted particular efforts as significant and influential and these are discussed at more length. To the extent possible, we offer people's analysis as to how the map of peacebuilding activities has changed over time.

A set of broad questions guided our interviews with civil society representatives on both sides of the conflict regarding unofficial peacebuilding efforts, including the following:

- What have Palestinian and Israeli NGOs and civil society groups been doing in the period since Camp David (2000)? How do they describe and evaluate their activities?
- What are the relationships between the NGOs and the government and political leadership in each society?
- How do they reconcile their ongoing efforts with the lack of peace or even real progress on the peacemaking front?
- What kind of contact and relationships are maintained between the Israeli and Palestinian groups and what linkages exist among groups within each society?
- What has been the role of outsiders (international NGOs, funders, peace practitioners) in the peacebuilding efforts?

At present, a list of about 120 organizations, committees, institutes and other agencies have self identified as Israeli and Palestinian peace NGOs. They range from local affiliates of international

organizations (e.g. Interpeace), through university centers (e.g. Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem), to local civil society groups in both the Palestinian and Israeli communities (e.g. Palestinian Peace Coalition in Ramallah and Yesh Din, Volunteers for Human Rights in Tel Aviv). About two-thirds of the groups are Israeli and one third Palestinian.

In 2005, an attempt to form a network of these disparate groups was jointly undertaken by the Tel Aviv-based Peres Center for Peace and by Panorama Center for Dissemination of Democracy & Community Development based in Ramallah. The Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum¹⁶ was the result. Prior to starting the Forum, smaller groups of Israeli and Palestinian peace organizations had held meetings in Helsinki, Rome and Seville to share information and program ideas. The driving force for organizing the NGO Peace Forum came on the Palestinian side from Dr. Riad Malki, a founder of Panorama and a long time civic activist in the Palestinian community and, at the time of this writing, the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian Authority. On the Israeli side, the support came from Dr. Ron Pundak, one of the two Israeli academics who had organized the Oslo peace track in 1992, and currently the Director General of the Peres Center for Peace. At the operational level, there are two coordinators of the Forum, one working in Ramallah and the other in Tel Aviv. The work, however, is not easy and one of the themes that run through many of our discussions comes out quite clearly in the Forum's literature: "...movement restrictions limit face to face contact between Israelis and Palestinians, limiting opportunities for reconciliation activities and humanization of the other side."¹⁷ Operationally, the difficulty in direct contact caused by the closure of borders and restrictions on travel by Israelis to Palestinian population centers and by Palestinians to Israel has limited group interactions and joint initiatives. The NGO Peace Forum organizes its work on three "platforms:" Palestinian NGOs, Israeli NGOs, and joint conferences. Much of the work is internal to each society.

For reasons not immediately obvious to an outside observer, a second coordinating group was also established at about the same time in 2005. The Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) while smaller includes in its roster many of the same Israeli and Palestinian organizations but has its headquarters in the U.S. and has an explicit aim of influencing U.S. government's Middle East policy. The most visible figure in ALLMEP is Avi Meyerstein, a Washington, D.C. lawyer and lobbyist. A sense of some tension between the two coordinating groups manifests itself in the "Memorandum of Understanding" which appears on the Forum's website. They describe their relationship as follows: "The Forum and ALLMEP agree that there are many areas in which the two umbrella organizations should combine their efforts in order to create beneficial synergies. The main goal of the Forum is to coordinate efforts between Palestinian and Israeli NGO executives, while the main goal of ALLMEP is to raise awareness and expand funding sources for grassroots peace-builders."¹⁸ The MOU then outlines a series of areas in which they agree to cooperate. Curiously, in our discussions in Israel and Palestine, including those with the key leaders of the Forum, the existence of ALLMEP was never mentioned.

¹⁶ See the website of the Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum, <http://www.peacengo.org/>, for more information. For more information on the two organizations that facilitated the process to establish the Forum, see <http://www.panoramacenter.org> and <http://www.peres-center.org>.

¹⁷ <http://www.peacengo.org/history.asp>

¹⁸ <http://www.peacengo.org/cms/upload/MOU%20ALLMEP%20&%20PIPNE.doc>

Track II Initiatives

Several interviewees pointed out that since 2000 many individuals and organizations working on peace issues have shifted their focus from grassroots and people-to-people efforts to policy-focused efforts. To this end, a prominent Palestinian academic and editor noted that “[b]efore, many activities were focused on how to influence public opinion. Now, most activities are focused on influencing decision-makers. Not, many grassroots activities are taking place, partly because of restrictions. Now, people are approaching leaders and influencing the positions of negotiators and the leaders who are involved in the official track.” The following are several Track II efforts that people highlighted during our interviews.

The Ayalon-Nusseibeh Plan (The “People’s Voice”)

Two unofficial documents published in 2002 and 2003 attempted to move the peace discussions into the public arena. The first, a single-page statement of principles written by Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh and published on July 20, 2002, restated the basic principles of the Clinton Parameters and the Taba proposals. It had the explicit intent of gaining wide support in the Palestinian and Israeli communities. Both authors had held official positions: Ayalon had been the director of the Israeli secret service Shin Bet and head of the Israeli Navy, and Nusseibeh, as a scion of an old and very prominent Palestinian-Jerusalem family, had been the Palestine Authority’s official representative for Jerusalem and President of Al Quds University. Ayalon has been back in the Cabinet, while Nusseibeh remains at the University. The statement has been signed by more than 150,000 Israelis and more than 125,000 Palestinians.

Geneva Accord / Initiative

The second document, the Geneva Accord, is a fifty-page detailed outline of a permanent status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.¹⁹ It was drafted by two teams of individuals, some of whom have had close ties to government and previous official negotiations. The Israeli group was led by Yossi Beilin, veteran peace negotiator and Minister of Justice in the Barak government and a participant at Taba; the Palestinian group was led by Yasser Abed Rabbo, former Minister of Information, participant in the Camp David and Taba negotiations and a long time PLO leader. The text of the Geneva Accord is the fullest proposal for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and incorporates many of the ideas and suggestions that had been generated during earlier negotiations. It represents what Roger Fisher and others have called a single negotiating text²⁰ to which the conflicting parties can respond and ultimately amend and adapt. While working on the text, the group had in mind several goals:

- To outline what they believed were workable agreements on *all* the outstanding issues (the final status issues) between the Palestinians and Israelis and spell out the end game up front,

¹⁹ See <http://www.geneva-accord.org/>. The Geneva Initiative was formed to disseminate the Accord and “to bring that moment of peace closer, by showing the way and preparing public opinion and leadership to be accepting of the real compromises required to solve the conflict.”

²⁰ R. Fisher, W. Ury & B Patton, *Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (2d edition) (New York: Penguin, 1991), 113-116.

rather than deferring it to some later phase and leaving the agreements open to being undermined—in this way, they would avoid the pitfalls of Oslo;

- To demonstrate that there was a negotiating partner on the other side and to show that the two parties could work through to final agreements without a third party mediator;
- To achieve high visibility and support in the international community, without whose outside assistance implementation would be very difficult. The official release of the agreements came at a December, 2003 festive event in Geneva presided over by former US President Jimmy Carter;
- To recruit support explicitly in their own societies among both the public and the elites. On the Israeli side, this meant an end run around a hostile government and enlistment of leaders of the opposition Labor Party. Copies of the Accord were mailed to every Israeli household. The Palestinians attempted to secure explicit leadership support, as well as broad civic approval, and they distributed the text of the agreement as widely as possible under the conditions of occupation.

One of the Palestinian partners of the Geneva Initiative reflected back to its genesis: “The process involved former officials, former PLO members, people who talked to each other before. We wanted to establish a Track II process and to keep the group distinct from the official peace process. Geneva Initiative is committed to continuing joint projects and collaboration, and we insist on working together, and not being sidetracked by negative events. We did not want to be affected by negative events, but of course as humans we are not immune. When Gilad Shalit was captured (an Israeli soldier abducted and held in captivity in the Gaza Strip since 2006), we were not able to go ahead with our planned schedule and present an important document; the tensions were high.”

The Geneva Initiative maintains centers in Tel Aviv and Ramallah and continues to disseminate the key message of the Accord and educate the public about options. The Israeli representative described the ongoing work on changing people’s attitudes this way: “If people ask, ‘but how would you solve this or that issue....?’ We say, here is a solution, look in the document [Geneva Accords]. You can disagree with it, but don’t say there are no solutions.” A recent Geneva Initiative conference focused on “how” to feed these solutions into the Annapolis process, specifically questions around relations with Syria, Lebanon, the Arab Initiative, the settlements, public opinion, and what needs to happen for the agreement to be reached. The important distinction that was made by our interlocutor is that “[m]any Israeli peace organizations support the end of occupation. In other words, the peace camp in Israel, is an anti-occupation camp. The GI supports the end of conflict. For GI, it is vital to have a partner for that. For ending occupation, you don’t have to have a partner. All of our work is joint, we insist on always meeting in mixed groups. We don’t have a *raison d’être* without the partner on the other side. This is a joint initiative in principle and in all its forms.”

Geneva Initiative sponsors public events and discussions in Israel which feature prominent Palestinian speakers (political leaders, Fatah members, civic leaders, mayors, assistants to ministers, etc.). Through these seminars and speaker series, the Palestinian speakers address particular Israeli audiences: women in the Kadima Party (a centrist political party), the Russian Jewish community, Likud (a conservative political party), Shas Party (primarily representing Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews), and the Arab-Israeli community. Israeli members of the audience at these events have reported a change in their perceptions of the Palestinians saying that they

would negotiate with this particular Palestinian person or people that spoke at these events. Since 2003, these meetings continue to address joint strategies and support joint activities focused on current and future actions towards a final settlement. The aim of this ongoing work is to reach and engage the “effective public,” the voting public, those who influence decision makers and policy makers themselves. The Geneva Initiative staff stressed that the most important part of these events was for Israeli audiences to meet and hear Palestinians committed to peace.

The Geneva Initiative representative was pointed in his remarks about what kinds of activities ultimately make a difference: “Trust is built through political agreements, not soccer games. We don’t do much people-to-people activities, because after all these years, after Oslo, we want to focus on decision-makers and influential people. The bottom-up approach is not something we are deeply committed to, but our high school project is motivated by a belief that ‘if we fail at everything else, at least we are doing something for the future.’ The high school level project is an exception and a very small percent of our budget.”

Bringing Peace Together (BPT)²¹

The BPT Program was established in 2004 with an objective of linking together different peace movements and organizations in order to generate options and policy directions that would inform the official negotiation process. The Jerusalem office of the Panorama Center for the Dissemination for Democracy and Community Development, headed by Walid Salem, is the coordinating organization of this initiative. The program “works across the Palestinian-Israeli division to bridge the gap between the two peoples, this project was build on the basis of two assumptions: The first is that the peace movements in Israel, Palestine, and internationally, are working parallel to each other, and the second is that coordination is possible between these movements, whatever political and ideological differentiations between them.”²² Among the participating organizations are Israeli peace movement “Peace Now,” IPCRI, International Peace Cooperation Center (IPCC), the Arik Institute, the Youth Forum for Development, as well as members of the Geneva Initiative and the People’s Voice Initiative. BPT strives to work with groups that represent the mainstream and the political right in both societies, not just the left or the “peaceniks.” BPT staff stress that this initiative “is not about dialogue, so much as about conflict transformation. The aim is to create ideas, conceptual frameworks for negotiators to work within.” During the 2008 negotiations, the organization sent faxes to Condoleezza Rice and George Bush and has since written to President Obama.

In May 2008, seven scenarios were presented to a group that included representatives from conservative Israeli Likud party and many others from across the political spectrum. According to BPT staff, “There was recognition that Annapolis peace process was failing and that we need a multilateral approach. BPT is not trying to copy what others are doing but to generate options, summarize them and feed into the official conversations. We have not yet been able to engage religious extremists but a Hamas representative participated in some BPT events. Many haven’t yet figured out a formula for bringing together the Islamists and secularists. This results in a

²¹ See <http://www.panoramacenter.org/etemplate.php?id=143> for a description of the program.

²² *Ibid.*

failure to bridge the divide between the Islamic component, the Arab nationalists and the Palestinian national movement.”

*Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)*²³

IPCRI was established in 1988 as a joint Israeli-Palestinian institution dedicated to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of “two states for two peoples” solution. IPCRI promotes and facilitates dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian civil societies with the aim of developing new concepts and ideas to enrich the political and public discourse and to influence decision makers and challenge the current political reality. According to the Israeli staff person, “we work on track II, track III or grassroots initiatives, on joint work and on uni-national projects all of which are powerful.” IPCRI maintains two Track II working groups, the Strategic Thinking and Analysis Team (STAT) and the Economic Working Group (EWG). One of the co-directors stated that “the non-official peace process was always and is still very important. It creates space for ‘thinking out of the box,’ narrows options, keeps discussions going and relations alive when the official process is ruptured. Track II and grassroots peace work is important but it is critical to have leaders involved in making progress on the final settlement.”

Within these Track II initiatives, IPCRI prepares policy papers and talking points on final status negotiations issues (water, Jerusalem, security, etc) to inform and advise the negotiation teams from both sides of the conflict. IPCRI’s Security Committee has worked on issues of reinstating Palestinian security institutions in the West Bank (Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus). According to IPCRI staff, there has been some progress, and Palestinians have re-assumed more control over security in these cities. When the Annapolis peace talks began, IPCRI produced jointly written policy documents to inform the process. The staff see one of the direct successes of IPCRI in the way that the negotiation process seriously considered integrating their idea, “The Culture of Peace,” as part of a negotiated settlement. IPCRI is working to convince them to build it into the agreement from the beginning (in specific areas such as school curriculum, civil society work, face to face interactions). According to one of the directors, “in Oslo, people-to-people (P2P) activity was an afterthought and was badly done, was seen as a lip service and was not well funded.”

Cross-Border / People-to-People Initiatives

People-to-people initiatives often referred to by the acronym P2P, have become a mainstay on the Palestinian-Israeli peacebuilding landscape. A large number of external funding organizations and private donors began enthusiastically supporting these efforts soon after the Oslo Accords. Many projects involved and employed joint teams of Palestinians and Israelis and most activities were premised on the “contact hypothesis,” which posits that increased interpersonal contact can effectively reduce prejudice and stereotyping between groups in conflict and improve inter-group relations.²⁴ Over the years, people who participated in people-to-people initiatives included secondary school youth, college students, teachers, professors and

²³ See <http://www.ipcri.org/> for information about the organization.

²⁴ See G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1954).

other professionals, women's groups and families who have lost loved ones to the violence. One critique that has been voiced by observers and some of the organizers of such cross-border work is that most of these efforts failed to engage people holding conservative or extremist points of view and have largely tapped into the educated, professional class on both sides.

A prominent Palestinian businessman, publisher and activist working in the Jerusalem area offered this overview of the current state of Israeli-Palestinian inter-group work: "Today, there are more people involved in cross-border dialogue than before. Some of this dialogue work has been sustained and is consistent, especially where it takes place sectorally: with women, youth, wounded, or bereaved families." However, many others noted the challenges with this work in the current context of border closings, travel restrictions, and widespread disillusionment with the prospects for peace. People mentioned reduced funding available for this work as another obstacle to sustaining existing or starting new cross-border initiatives. The role of funding is addressed in more detail in a later section of this report.

Several people highlighted the work of the following organizations:

- Seeds of Peace – a non-profit organization based in the United States with offices in Tel Aviv and in the West bank, which brings Israeli and Palestinian youth to a summer camp in the United States and organizes follow-up skill-building and dialogue activities with former participants and community members in the region throughout the year.
- Combatants for Peace - an organization founded in 2005 by former Israeli soldiers and by Palestinians who took part in the violent struggle for Palestinian freedom, works to raise public awareness about the suffering experienced by both sides, to advocate for reconciliation and non-violent struggle and to pressure both governments to stop the cycle of violence, end the occupation and resume a constructive dialogue.
- Just Vision – a non-profit which uses media and educational tools to inform local and international audiences about under-documented Palestinian and Israeli joint civilian efforts to resolve the conflict nonviolently. The organization's aim is to encourage civic participation in grassroots peace building.
- The Palestine-Israel Journal – an independent, non-profit quarterly publication jointly produced by a team of Israelis and Palestinians "as an explicit joint venture promoting dialogue and the quest for a peaceful resolution of the conflict."²⁵

In addition, the work of IPCRI and Wasatiya were mentioned by other organizations. We highlight key points from our interviews with these two organizations below.

IPCRI engages Israelis and Palestinians in grassroots or "people to people" work in addition to producing policy-focused recommendations described earlier. The organization uses thematic meetings, educational seminars and conferences as well as community-based initiatives to bring people together. A Palestinian staff member of the organization shared the challenges that the organization faces as it continues to link people across the border: "IPCRI doesn't bow to pressure. We get a lot of trouble from extremists from both sides – ultra-leftist and not even as much from the ultra right, but it is key to continue with an on-going dialogue. We kept meeting through both Intifadas. We do not take sides, which is very important. We call ourselves a 'thin

²⁵ <http://www.peacengo.org/organization.asp?ID=68>

thread of sanity.’ We continue to speak with fundamentalists and Hamas. The PLO took thirty years to change positions, but Hamas moved within two years as much as the PLO moved in thirty years. But working with Hamas has too many restrictions from Israel, Egypt and the US – embargo, funding restrictions, etc.” His Israeli colleague was one of the few clearly optimistic voices we heard. He talked about an idea he had developed, “fostering the culture of peace,” with joint teams working on the issue as well as the practical issues of the future of Jerusalem and conflicts over water. At the time of the interview, IPCRI was establishing an “Israeli-Palestinian Business Forum” to facilitate business movement and passageways for goods across the border. The forum will be run by an Israeli-Palestinian team and it aims to develop business relations and strengthen trade relations across the border.

In the recent years, IPCRI began to work directly in communities facilitating links and projects that offer practical solutions to day-to-day problems that have a potential of sparking tensions. In collaboration with the Governor of Jenin and Israeli authorities, IPCRI started a water sanitation project in a village located near the security barrier in Jenin which had no sewage system. The project is looking into new technologies for water purification. An Israeli water engineer from a nearby kibbutz and an IPCRI intern (an engineer by background) were involved in the design of the water system. The Palestinian co-chair of IPCRI noted, “This is a non-traditional area of work for IPCRI and is based on analysis of what people in some areas really need. They are tired of peace-building and peace education. Small villages are forgotten by the Palestinian Authority’s Public Works Department.” IPCRI staff suggested that this community-based intervention helped strengthen relations and improve the situation for the villagers. IPCRI hopes to use this project as a model for other areas. However, funding has become a real obstacle to sustaining their activities as “donor fatigue” has set in, and donors, especially international, have backed away. Not all of IPCRI’s funders demand joint activities, but most do prefer them. The organization has had to reduce salaries and staff when the budget shrunk from \$1.6 million a year to \$300,000 a year.

Wasatiya (‘middle’) was founded by a Jerusalem-based Palestinian academic to address the need for religious tolerance and harmony, which he sees as a critical step towards peace. The organization aims to foster inter-faith dialogue between the three religions centered around a core concept: moderation. According to the founder, imams have demonized moderation, and this concept and principle requires rehabilitation. He added that *Wasatiya*’s work is based on the premise that “Inter-faith dialogue can help build trust which will help make political dialogue possible.” The focus on moderation is distinguished from the more general inter-faith dialogue encompassing many other issues. Within the Palestinian Muslim community, *Wasatiya*’s work focuses on uncovering the meaning of moderation in Islam and the Koran. The expectation is that inter-faith dialogue would help uncover and bring to light what moderation means in Judaism and Christianity. *Wasatiya*’s founder sees a need to demystify the “other” and talk about myths and misinterpretations. The organization works with both moderates and extremists discarding an assumption that “moderates” have already made a full move towards peace. According to the founder, “It is the ‘middle’ that we have to address – they vote for both Hamas and Fatah, for both Likud and Labor. In people-to-people talks, you tend to find nice people, maybe even make a friend. However, no more than \$20 million were invested in people-to-people activities. But almost \$3 billion went into building the [separation] wall. The business of war is more profitable than peace.” There has been lots of resistance and attacks on “*Wasatiya*”

from Hamas, Fatah, and other political parties, and the founder received several death threats. At the time of the interview, Wasatiya had no Israeli staff.

Activism, Advocacy and Non-Violent Action

Many Israeli activist organizations began their work in the late 1970s and 1980s during the height of the “anti-occupation” campaign in Israel. These included Women in Black, Gush Shalom, Shalom Ashchav/Peace Now and other organizations traditionally seen as part of the Israeli peace camp. A more recent wave of activist organizations came after the second intifada. The continued construction of settlements, the construction of the security barrier separating Israel and West Bank and the restrictions placed on Palestinians’ movement prompted renewed Israeli and Palestinian direct action campaigns against the occupation. They also prompted protests against human rights violations by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and by settlers living in the West Bank. Israeli organizations such as Machsom Watch and Yesh Din monitor the behavior of soldiers and police at checkpoints and report violations to government authorities and to the wider public. On the Palestinian side, the direct actions have largely taken the form of group demonstrations and non-violent protests without a formal organization structure.

The topic of non-violence was raised by a number of people who saw it as an important principle to guide the current grassroots peace efforts. One Israeli activist-academic argued that, “One way to reverse today’s reality is a strong non-violent movement on the Palestinian side. But if nothing changes, it will probably move to violence very quickly.” A Palestinian peace advocate and academic added: “If we can move Palestinians to recognize the power of non-violence, we can shift in a major way. We need to recognize that non-violence produces more results.” Other people offered more nuanced view of what non-violence means in the Palestinian context. One Palestinian grassroots activist pointed to a critical need to focus activism in the right direction, which is not always towards the border: “Among the Palestinians, there is an agreement that you don’t talk about a peace movement under occupation. If someone gets grants and a ‘foreign push’ to talk about peace, these people are seen as without roots in the community. Palestinians talk about resistance (violent or non-violent). But democracy-building and governance issues are also critical for Palestinian society and there are very important activities going on with Palestinian NGOs working on democracy, as distinct from peace activities with Israelis, but rather focused on strengthening civil society and democratic institutions within Palestine.”

At the time of our interviews, Just Vision (based in Jerusalem) was filming a documentary about current grassroots Palestinian non-violent resistance in the West Bank. The film highlights several local leaders who have mobilized people in surrounding villages to protest the house demolitions carried out by Israeli bulldozers near the security barrier. These non-violent acts of resistance, locally initiated, are not funded through external sources and do not target Israeli soldiers directly. One of the leaders highlighted in the film has been able to save his house by protesting non-violently; he now goes to other villages to share his story and encourages others to resist without violence. Another person featured in the film is a former political prisoner who educated himself in non-violence teachings by reading Gandhi’s book. After his release from Israeli prison, he gathered all his friends and shared his views about non-violence. Some people in the community issued leaflets signed by political party members against him and accused him of being a traitor and a collaborator. He persisted and opened a center on non-violence continuing to speak to groups all around West Bank. According to Just Vision staff, this man

has been able to train and persuade other people to become non-violent activists. He is now one of the Fatah leaders in his area as well as a member of Combatants for Peace and an organizer of many non-violent demonstrations.

The staff at Just Vision commented that “unfortunately, the media here is not interested in covering peace demonstrations in Palestine, but would come if there was a terrorist attack. This is a problem. Also travel restrictions make it hard to bring people together. Both of these people believe that non-violent approach during the first intifada brought some success and they continue to support struggle against the settlements through non-violent means.” Reflecting on the effectiveness of actions focused on just one side of the border, the staff added, “Sometimes you need to focus on your own community. Not all Palestinians and Israelis are ready for joint activities and these activities should not be seen as a panacea. Joint activities structured around specific issues are most successful. But first, the grassroots Palestinian leaders need to start their work locally and only then go to meet Israelis and internationals. If they get recognition from internationals and the Israeli peace establishment, but fail to gain credibility and recognition within their own community, this would be useless to them.”

Likewise, one of the Palestinian co-sponsors of the joint Peace NGO Forum said that peace would require working from bottom up, arguing that, “On the Palestinian side, Fatah was the Palestinian peace movement but Fatah didn’t change its bylaws, which was problematic. From 1993 to 2000, Fatah was a key player in Palestine as a peace movement. Fatah youth movement representatives met with Likud youth and conducted many joint activities earlier on. Now – who are the peace groups among the Palestinians? The intellectuals of the peace movement came from the leftist organizations, even Marxist organizations [except Sari Nusseibeh and Faisal Husseini]. But when it came to people implementing peace agreements, the previous leftist intellectuals couldn’t do it without Fatah influentials. Fatah’s position was always fluid: when the peace process was riding high, they are for normalization but when the peace process is failing, Fatah retracts and even fights [Al Aqsa Brigades, etc]. When it comes to other parties, like People’s Party, Barghoutis and others, they become part of the ‘Israeli-Palestinian sect’ – they agree with each other on everything.” He then added an interesting observation: “Every Palestinian group or even individual has a partner on the Israeli side. Even Hamas, they have a partner in the Islamic Movement in Israel. Many Palestinian laborers still are in touch with some of their Israeli employers, merchants keep in touch, and academics keep in touch. There is great interdependence and intimacy that often goes unrecognized.” He also distinguished between the various platforms which currently exist among the people working to end the occupation and the violent conflict: “There are groups that work on non-violence, such as the National Initiative. People who are against armed resistance and for non-violence, but they are also against the Oslo Peace Process. Then there are groups that work on democracy and governance and civil society strengthening. They do not engage in direct peace building. These are people who believe that attention needs to turn towards inside [within each society].”

People who expressed disillusionment with the Annapolis process often brought up advocacy work and political pressure within Israeli and Palestinian societies as an important realm which requires more attention. In addition, some people discussed plans for unilateral actions on both sides as potential alternatives for people-led change if official peace efforts fail.

Intra-communal / Single Identity Work

Interpeace in Israel

Interpeace is an international peacebuilding organization with offices in Israel and in the West Bank. The Israeli Coordinator of Interpeace described the overarching aim of the program this way: “Yossi Beilin proposed the idea of Interpeace as a ‘complimentary tool to any peace process’ at whatever stage. Interpeace, aims to explore views, perspectives and visions of people in each society, from the majority through the extremists; to allow people to express their aspirations and a vision for a future state, and to build capacity for dialogue.” In Israel, Interpeace works with the following groups within the Israeli society: 1) traditional religious population (through the Shas Party); 2) pro-Settlers (through leaders among the ex-settlers community of Gush-Katif (Gaza Strip)); 3) Palestinian Arabs citizens of Israel (through the National Committee of Local Arab Authorities in Israel); and 4) the core of the Israeli society also referred to as the Silent Majority (through local authorities, such as town mayors).

Interpeace engages these communities in a facilitated dialogue process to help them articulate a vision for the geopolitical future of the region and to strengthen the capacity of the community's leadership to become active participants in the public debates and in the policy processes that shape Israel's position. Interpeace's work is based on the premise that “by helping each of the identified sectors in the development of their own visions for a peaceful future, the necessary elements for an overall understanding on the basic principles for co-existence will emerge. Convergence on such basic principles will constitute a key contribution for the concrete proposals that will eventually allow the peoples of the region to co-exist in peace.”²⁶ Interpeace also provides access to literature on past peace processes, history of the conflict, as well as English classes, and information on Islam. They work together with the Geneva Initiative on civic dialogue initiatives and public education.

Before launching the program in 2004, the Interpeace team analyzed the Israeli and Palestinian societies and their respective socio-political sectors and distinct constituencies. Their assessment, summarized during our interviews with Interpeace representative, was that “Israeli peace camp is not very big, but it is very vocal. The peace camp did not sustain its momentum because they forgot to look back and to see if they had followers.” Interpeace sees the core of the Israeli society (referred to as the silent majority) as the biggest leverage group in the political realm but recognizes that most people in this societal sector are disappointed with the national Government. This explains the organization's choice to engage the “silent majority” through local authorities and municipalities rather than through national structures since the town mayors have taken increased responsibility for security, reconstruction and the central government is doing less. While mapping the sectors, Interpeace staff met key leaders representing each sector to start working on a visioning process. The central question posed to all of them was, “What is your geo-political vision for this conflict area, thirty years from now?” People expressed their aspirations and future visions with their children in mind.

²⁶ For more information on Interpeace activities in Israel, please visit <http://www.interpeace.org/index.php/Israel/Main-Activities.html>

Interpeace trains and employs facilitators from within each community to lead the visioning process. The “Future Vision” document issued by the Israeli- Arab group came out as a result of this work.²⁷ The Arab Israeli group is now in the process of drawing up an Action Plan for each point in the vision document and has begun to discuss it with Jewish Israeli counterparts. Interpeace sees the process as internally owned and recognizes that each group may or may not produce its own visioning statement. At the time of the interview, the religious sector group was expected to produce policy papers and political points and to present these to their leaders followed by discussions with the Islamic leaders’ group in Israel.

Interpeace in Palestine

The Palestinian program of Interpeace is based in the West Bank and has launched a parallel process in 2004, called the Mustakbalna project (“Our Future”) which began as a dialogue within the Palestinian society around a fundamental question: “What do Palestinians want and what is their vision of the future?” According to Interpeace program documents, the project seeks to promote greater involvement and convergence among the key socio-political sectors within Palestinian society, including previously marginalized groups as well as the current political leaders. The overall goal of the program is to increase societal dialogue among the various socio-political groups in Palestine and to build intra-Palestinian consensus on key political, social and economic issues. The program sees strengthened intra-communal civic dialogue as an effective tool for the resolution of the larger inter-communal conflict.²⁸ To achieve this goal, Interpeace West Bank program has identified and engaged the following four sectors within the Palestinian society: 1) representatives from different geographic areas in the West Bank; 2) pressure groups including ex-political prisoners and youth; 3) representatives from Gaza (security situation permitting); and 4) the Palestinian Diaspora in the Middle East with a focus on Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The case authors were unable to meet with the representative in the West Bank office to hear more about the program.

Public Opinion and Research

Several prominent organizations in Israel and Palestine are dedicated to informing the public about the issues at stake in the conflict and about the developments in the peace process. Among these are the Peres Center for Peace, The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at the Tel Aviv University, the Panorama Center in Ramallah, Palestinian Center for Public Opinion in Beit Sahour and several others. This area of work has traditionally been spearheaded by academics and peace researchers who saw public opinion research not only as a means for “taking societal temperature” by polling the populace on particular issues but also as a way of educating the public and shaping their perceptions and attitudes on the core conflict issues, the obstacles to settlement and the possible ways forward. There was a broad agreement among people we interviewed that public opinion is a critical factor in shaping the domestic policies and agendas for the official negotiation processes over the years. They also pointed to the differences in how the multiple constituencies on each side have tried to influence their leaders and how little of this

²⁷ “The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel.”
<http://www.adalah.org/newsletter/eng/dec06/tasawor-mostaqbali.pdf>

²⁸ To learn more about the work of Interpeace in Palestine, visit
<http://www.interpeace.org/index.php/Palestine/Strategy.html>

opinion shaping has taken place between the different constituencies on each side (i.e. peace movement vis-à-vis settlers or religious conservatives in Israel, or Palestinian democratic parties vis-à-vis Hamas or radical Islam followers). People mentioned critical information gaps in educating both polities about “options for peace,” gaps which continue to be filled with biased analysis from one-sided media outlets shaping the public discourse in ways that is detrimental to the on-going peace process.

The Israeli editor of a joint research publication noted that “[p]ublic opinion in Israel and Palestine is not extremely far apart but can be brought closer together. Not all Israelis think that Palestinians are terrorists, and vice versa. But Palestinians live with expansion of settlements, confiscation of land, humiliation at checkpoints, etc. Belief that Israelis are not interested in peace and bitter feelings are growing and not reducing. And even the absence of Palestinian violence doesn’t improve Israeli attitudes or behavior.” A Palestinian researcher and advocate for more Track II interventions also added: “But this effort of influencing decision makers shouldn’t be a substitute for also trying to bring the public opinion on two sides closer to each other. No leadership decision or final settlement can take place without strong public support. These processes should be happening in parallel.”

Research commissioned by Interpeace looked at public opinion about the peace efforts since Oslo and the perceived results from all of these efforts. The research was later used to inform programs of War Torn Societies Project and later for Interpeace. According to the summary provided by Interpeace representative, the joint Israeli-Palestinian research team concluded that:

- Negotiators in the official peace process were not seen as representing the interests of the people on either side of the divide;
- Israeli population is not really aware of options for peace and why they should choose them. The Oslo Peace Process educated Israelis about the “cost of peace” but not all the options. People believed if they support the two-state solution, they are “peaceniks”, if they don’t, then they are against peace. No other option was fully or publicly discussed. The spectrum of opinions put forth in the print and online media include such widely polarized options as population transfer, a dictatorial/apartheid system of Israeli control over subordinate Palestinian territories, integration of West Bank into Jordan, a uni-national democratic state, a bi-national state or confederation. A survey was done on the bi-national state option: settlers were for it, the peace camp was against it (or didn’t come out for it because it was afraid of the “Arab lover syndrome.”
- the ownership of the peace process was seen as problematic from the start – “Oslo”, “Camp David”, “Geneva” – the process was never locally owned, someone else’s capital was in the name.

Several interviewees noted that much of the analysis and research that has been done over the years on the conflict dynamics, practical solutions to final status issues and other critical conflict areas, has failed to enter the policy realm with the exception of the concerted efforts such as the Geneva Initiative and few other policy-focused Track II efforts. An Israeli staff member of IPCRI reflected on the utility of all past research efforts: “Research consolidation is critical because loads has been written on previous negotiation attempts but none of the current negotiation team members have time to read all the analyses and research and policy papers that have been produced. We are pulling this all together and making it available.”

Funding for Peace

The post-Oslo rise in the number of organizations and projects competing for peace funds has been referred to as the growth of the “peace industry” in Israel and to a lesser extent in Palestine. Since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, there has been a gradual reduction of organizational funding for peace related activities on either side of the divide and a subsequent drop in the number of peace projects. A representative of one prominent funding agency supporting people-to-people initiatives offered this facetious remark, “If there was one single good thing about the second intifada, it was that those people who were in the peacebuilding field for the money disappeared. It became harder to work, harder to bring people together, and only the committed stayed around. The so called ‘peace industry’ cleared out a bit.” There is general agreement with this assessment at the practitioner level. Veteran peace practitioners, however, resent having their work described as an industry. One Israeli peace activist had this to say: “It is upsetting when people talk about the ‘peace industry’ because most people doing this work are very committed, sharing a very personal and deep dedication to this work. But the competition for funding is real. The best financial times for IPCRI were after the beginning of Intifada, when all the non-serious peace groups dropped off, which freed up some resources.”

The election of Hamas in the Gaza Strip led bilateral donors such as the United States and other funding agencies to set conditions and limits on their funding. These constraints dealt a serious blow to project activities that aimed to engage Palestinian participants representing a wide spectrum of political positions. One interviewee recalled, “Funding has been an issue since Hamas came to power. Two contracts with the US State Department were cancelled; one was a project with the Education Ministry in Gaza and the other project meant to bring Israeli and Palestinian Mayors to work together. Funds were cancelled because some of the Mayors were Hamas-affiliated and we couldn’t use US government funds for these activities.”

Staff of the EU Partnership for Peace (PfP), one of the funding agencies which has committed financial and technical resources to support peacebuilding in the region for more than a decade, offered the following differentiations when discussing the overall decrease of peace funds: “Many donors pulled out at the beginning of the Intifada. Generally, there is not much funding for Israel because it is not a developing country, but there are funds earmarked for the Palestinian territories. When donors distribute funds for joint initiatives, many Palestinians get upset because they see these as funds that were set aside for them, for development and civil society strengthening, etc. In reality, not as much outside peace money is available for Israel anymore, not since the intifada. There are lots of complaints about this, but in our case, we strive to avoid projects which are written in a way that superficially introduces ‘Palestinian partners’ into Israeli-written projects. Palestinians have complained that they are forced into projects with Israelis on terms that they can’t negotiate.”

According to the program staff, in the early days of PfP, most of the EU resources had been invested in supporting the work of political decision-makers and directly into the peace process. After Oslo Accords were signed, the pendulum had swung the other way and the program funded many people-to-people (P2P) initiatives. In 2000, EU Partnership for Peace Program changed its funding policies and began issuing calls for proposals. They have since commissioned an evaluation of the P2P projects PfP has funded and did an internal assessment of their funding strategy. An external evaluation conducted in 2005 concluded that PfP 1) supported too many

one-off activities; 2) did not support long-term capacity building among funded organizations, and 3) had impact on individuals greater than on the macro level (i.e., on the Middle East Peace Process). Program staff noted that PfP funding policies had since changed; proposals coming from outsiders (e.g., European NGOs) are now assessed for the value added, and outside initiatives are funded only if they are strategically linked to a local initiative or partner. As one staff person put it, “we don’t want any drive-by peace building projects.”

Israeli non-profit organizations working on peace education, diversity and capacity building were well established at the time of the Oslo peace process, and many others were formed in 1990s. On the Palestinian side, many Palestinian NGOs had traditionally been focused on humanitarian and social welfare issues in response to the occupation. Many Palestinian civic organizations for youth, women and professionals were closely affiliated with the PLO and later with Fatah. Increased competition for funds has negatively affected cooperation among Israeli and Palestinian NGOs and resulted in a loss of trust. People described an asymmetric relationship, mirroring the power dynamics embedded in the conflict itself, that has emerged over the years of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on peace projects. Israeli NGOs, by virtue of being long-established and better skilled in proposal writing, were often the initiators of the many cross-border projects and the direct recipients of the grants. In some cases, a Palestinian partner organization, or “Palestinian participants” were identified and invited into the project only after the funding had been given to the Israeli organization. This eventually led to a growing frustration on the part of the Palestinians, who saw their role as merely the “Palestinian counterpart helping to fill the project activities gap,” as one person exclaimed in an interview. This frustration has transformed itself into serious resentment as the following comments by several long-standing Palestinian peace advocates indicate:

“People to people activities have turned into business relationships: a grant, a set of activities, reports, bye-bye. There are more independent initiatives which are not well-funded and more in the shadows, but these often are more sustainable. When you are independent and you approach the Israelis on your own ground, it is balanced and genuine. When you join a funded project with Israelis, there is a power asymmetry and it often is unbalanced. Israelis tend to dominate joint initiatives. They get funds more easily and often rush to find colleagues or partner on the other side but on their conditions, on their grounds since they are the ones coming with funds.”

“Some Israelis are doing a ‘business,’ a career on the problems of Palestinians, on our cause. They are building their professional lives, establishing NGOs, getting funding from European and American sources.”

“Don’t turn us into a project. Joint activities are most genuine and sustainable when they emerge on their own and when availability of funding is not a condition. The International Women’s Commission turned down funds because it didn’t want to become an implementer of someone else’s ideas. Principled groups have to be able to turn down funds, but when they need funds, it is critical to have committed donors who recognize their work.”

There is a difference in opinions about where the peace funding should be directed. IPCRI is advocating for a financial commitment from donors that would match the level of support for peace activities provided to Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement (i.e. EU

Programme for Peace and Reconciliation). According to IPRCI staff, “Not enough resources are given to build a public peace process; only 9 million US dollars and 5 million Euros from EU. The peace money has declined and it is difficult to be strategic and comprehensive with limited resources. 120 NGOs are struggling to succeed in this work. There is donor fatigue, a shift in donor priorities and the uncertain political context, regional and global.”

A Palestinian non-violence advocate and film director offered these suggestions on where the outside funding should be directed: “Donors should go to villages and identify local leaders who are working on non-violence and development. Donors shouldn’t just support the Palestinian Authority and the official peace process. Support to the Palestinian Authority is critical because it builds institutional capacity and the government offices do require training and development of human resources. But often, only the higher level people attend professional development workshops. Local community-based groups in places like Tulkarem and Qalqiliya need this type of support too, beyond just funding. Grassroots leaders are important connectors that need to be supported.”

An Israeli NGO director suggested that “[o]utsiders need to influence the decision-makers and parties such as Shas, and the Russian community and need to support the joint work of influential actors by funding seminars and public events.” A Palestinian woman activist went on to identify other roles for outsiders: “Internationals have important roles to play, but they can’t impose outside solutions on people here. Their role needs to be that of a supporter: open spaces for new dialogue, and intellectual engagement on options here, and lobby and advocate in their own countries.”

VI. Many Steps towards Peace: Assessing the Impacts

The changes in the political context of Israel, West Bank and Gaza over the last decade have greatly influenced the lenses through which people understand and evaluate the earlier peace efforts. These changes also influence the way current peace efforts are conceptualized, conducted and perceived. A number of developments have had a detrimental effect not only on the landscape of peace efforts and activities but also on the attitudes of the general public on both sides: the erection of the security barrier, the unilateral withdrawal of settlements from Gaza, the election of Hamas in Gaza, the continued Israeli control over West Bank territories and more recently the war and blockade of Gaza Strip, as well as the overall geopolitical dynamics in the region (i.e. war in Iraq and political developments in the neighboring Arab nations). These events have also tested the resiliency of the peace process and of the different peace actors that have committed their professional and personal lives to finding a lasting solution. The Palestinian editor of a joint publication assessed the current situation this way:

“The role of informal peacemaking efforts is not separate from everything else going on or from the context. All these groups are now going through a crisis. The failure of the peace process has affected the number and quality of interactions and dialogue. It caused damage to the peace camp in Israel. Then, suicide bombers caused all kinds of damage. Subsequently, the wall and separation and restrictions resulted in freezing of many activities. Despite the closures and travel restrictions, groups like Palestine-Israel Journal, the Peres Center, Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) and others

continue to work jointly, in our case under one roof. Others like the Bereaved Families/Parents' Circle, Combatants for Peace, Anti-House Demolition groups continue to work together on cross-border projects and are incredibly courageous. I don't think peace activities have burned themselves out, but many solutions have already been generated through dialogue and writing. There is need to work together now to make these a reality."

A growing number of Palestinian organizations, however, recognize that "working together"—while still possible in limited ways—has become irrelevant in the current context, and many have shifted their energies and priorities elsewhere. The Palestinian representative of the Geneva Initiative expressed this growing ambivalence: "These are difficult times because there are 'enemies' on both sides of the divide and very little understanding. There are people who profit from the lingering conflict on both sides. So peace work is seen [as] 'rocking the boat,' 'serving the enemy's purpose.'" Increasingly, people are shifting away from singular focus on bringing people together for the sake of dialogue, and instead focusing on democracy-building, governance, transparency work and carving out an independent space for civil society.

This civil society and democracy strengthening work is seen as critical on the Palestinian side, where most NGOs in the 1990s were swept up in the Palestinian independence struggle and were effectively under the PLO's control. In contrast, today, there is a concerted move to strengthen participatory democratic processes (in the West Bank), despite the fact that the sovereignty of the Palestinian state and its borders are still under question. A growing frustration with the way the Palestinian Authority conducts its business in the West Bank and with the political split between West Bank and the Gaza Strip are the overarching domestic issues that concern ordinary Palestinians, who have become weary of the multiple attempts at peace which did not deliver any improvements in their everyday lives.

The focus on domestic issues, both in Palestine and Israel, does not negate the recognition held by people on both sides that the fates of the two societies are closely interlinked and that issues such as security and economic development will have to be addressed jointly in order to secure sustainable results. Still, this understanding is not shared by all the multiple constituencies within each society. After many years of official and non-official dialogue and hundreds of joint projects, there remain a number of critical gaps: between the official negotiation attempts and the civil society peace efforts, between the shrinking peace camp in Israel and the Israeli right and supporters of settlements, between Fatah and Hamas, between those supporting a two state solution and the growing number of people speaking out for a one-state solution. If anything, there has been more polarization on these and other critical issues than convergence of opinions or agendas.

To a keen observer of Israeli and Palestinian domestic politics this growing polarization may come as no surprise, in light of the deepening divisions in the political arena lacking a leader on either side able to serve as a bridge between the diverse constituencies. Yet to observers of the Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, this growing divergence is also perplexing, given the number of influential and committed people who have by now become skilled at political dialogue and negotiations and consensus building after years of practicing these skills in problem solving workshops, joint dialogue sessions, official negotiations, reconciliation initiatives and through personal ties. Only one person positively assessed these accumulated skills and capacities, saying that "Palestinian factions were often able to work together because of the culture of

dialogue that arose out of the Madrid and Oslo processes.” But a former PLO representative and a veteran of many official and non-official peace efforts said that many people in his age group are increasingly thinking, “We are about to retire, what have we achieved? The generations on both sides are reflecting on this question.”

Missing Links between Official Peace Processes and Civic Society Peacebuilding

Even after fifteen years, Israelis and Palestinians like to engage in a retrospective analysis of the successes and failures of the Oslo peace process. Many of our interviewees volunteered their reflections on this. Described by many as an exclusively political process, it did little to prepare the ordinary people on the ground for the consequences of the decisions taken at the top level. Much energy was invested in getting the support of the key political actors at the governmental level, but in retrospect, people wondered if the Israeli and Palestinian societies were prepared to make peace and agree to the concessions. A Palestinian peace worker insisted that “the Oslo Peace Process failed because they were not able to reach down to the everyday people. Nothing changed for regular Palestinian people.” An Israeli Track II advocate pointed to other important weakness: “Previous peace processes like Oslo and the ‘road map’ were about the process, but not about the settlement. The people had no understanding of what the destination was. If you pay for a ticket, you need to know what your destination is.”

Commenting on how he would analyze the contributions of these efforts, an American organizer of a series of Track II efforts over many years asserted that such evaluation was difficult because it is hard to isolate the actual contribution to peace. He could not claim success if an agreement was reached nor failure if it was not. Instead, he saw the contribution of Track II efforts to changing political culture in the two societies. His aim over the years, especially pre-Oslo, was to develop a cadre of people on each side of the divide familiar with people on the other side and with experience communicating with each other on difficult issues. Second, his dialogue process aimed to develop and disseminate new ideas on such critical issues as the creation of two states or Palestinian nationhood and then have these ideas debated within each society. Third, the goal was to create a political atmosphere conducive to a negotiated resolution, generate a sense of the possible and build mutual reassurance and sensitivity to language. The Oslo peace process failed, he believes, because of the failures of the interim period. The explicit goal of two states was not part of the Oslo agreements. The Palestinian leader Yassar Arafat did not say, “This is the end of the conflict.” When it came to key issues, each side reserved its options – the Israelis to retake control of the territories and the Palestinians to return to armed struggle. Of particular importance, he said, there was no public education for a common future.

There was some agreement among those interviewed that Track II and policy-focused dialogue efforts over the years did help shift the way most people saw options and obstacles to a lasting peace settlement. Among these obstacles are not only the difficult-to-negotiate final status issues (i.e. right of return of refugees, status of Jerusalem, borders), but also the domestic political pressures and blockages which effectively hindered the negotiation process on more than one occasion. As one Israeli professor noted, “Track II efforts helped bring up alternative solutions and options and allowed a switch of mind on issues such as Jerusalem. But these options were not always accepted.” A Palestinian commentator offered this assessment: “Dialogue and informal efforts don’t always have a major impact on decision makers, but we shouldn’t underestimate their contributions. Some of the ‘old guard’ and veterans of the problem-solving

workshops and other joint non-official activities are now in decision-making circles or have direct access to leaders.”

One Anglo-Israeli argued that in Israel a civil society movement strong enough to end the occupation has not been built and that much options generation remains to be done on the permanent status issues, such as Jerusalem, as well as a concerted effort to involve Hamas in Track II talks. He pondered on the relative effectiveness of civil society activities as compared to the more focused Track II effort, wondering if in the end, it was perhaps more effective to have deep but narrow support or really broad but shallow support for peace. A few people argued that there is still a real need for exposing more Palestinians and Israelis to each other as there was not yet a critical mass of people who are experienced in discourse with each other.

The Geneva Initiative was one of several attempts to break through the standstill in the political process during 2000-2003 by generating enthusiasm from below. The Israeli representative of the Geneva Initiative shared the following perspective: “For many years, peace was desirable but not tangible. A lot of people on both sides supported it, but many didn’t believe it was possible in the near future. That’s why Geneva Initiative was an important step towards showing what peace would really look like; let the people touch it in the form of this document. The messages of the Geneva Initiative are: ‘there is a partner, there is a plan.’ The language is ‘agreement, bilateralism, not a partial deal, but a comprehensive agreement.’ For years, peace groups in Israel talked about why peace is important and what the carrots will be. But there has been an important shift. Now people are asking, ‘what will happen if the two-state solution doesn’t happen? What will the sticks be?’”

The Annapolis peace process has been influenced by these earlier experiences and lessons learned, and people pointed to a noticeable shift in the approach and substance of the negotiations. According to one observer, during the Annapolis process, Abu Mazen and Olmert wanted, for the first time, to negotiate a comprehensive package, instead of negotiating issue by issue as before. Israel for the first time openly accepted the principle of a two-state solution, even as several prominent Palestinians issued a call for “one man, one vote” or one-state solution. The official negotiation teams at Annapolis maintained contacts with key think tanks and non-government groups, such as the Reut Institute, Jerusalem Institute, Geneva Initiative, IPCRI, Tel Aviv National Security Institute and the Palestinian Negotiations Support Unit, thus drawing on the policy briefs and blueprints that have been prepared by these groups.

There was an expressed sense of urgency to bring a resolution by the end of 2008, but skeptical observers explained this as political maneuvering by both Olmert and Abu Mazen to improve their domestic standing and image. One observer saw the domestic imperatives as a potential leverage: “The weakness and dysfunctional nature of the two political systems is for the first time the strength of the peace process. This is a matter of survival for both leaders. Before, it was different.” However, neither leader worked hard to bring on board the skeptics within their respective societies and to prepare their constituencies for significant concessions necessary to achieve the visions they had set out to achieve. With an echo of lessons learned during Oslo in the background, this begs a question – whose role is it to bring the rest of the public along?

Many Peace Actors and Constituencies but No Shared Vision

A retrospective analysis of peacebuilding efforts brings to light several key developments, all of which have had an impact on the peace process. The proliferation of the peace industry following Oslo, the reinforcement of existing asymmetries in the relationship between the two sides by Israelis occupying the driver's seat in most joint projects, and the too-close involvement of Palestinian official structures in defining the parameters and substance of civic-initiated peace and reconciliation work have led to many disjointed and fruitless efforts. With more outside funds initially and enthusiastically committed to peace activities than could be absorbed by the existing civil society sector, many short-sighted and short-lived projects crowded the scene. A Palestinian representative of the Geneva Initiative added his analysis about this evolution: "Civil society initiatives and approaches allow for a possibility of creative, open dialogue because they are often positioned outside of the official constraints. However, on the Palestinian side, civil society efforts were greatly influenced by the People-to-People (P2P) programs developed after Oslo that were dominated by Palestinian political bodies. The idea of an NGO arena free of government influence was not the reality. This was different on the Israeli side. Civil society approaches didn't achieve what was expected. Some P2P projects in essence became a financial support system to many people, a form of employment."

As the failure of Oslo became apparent to many organizations and peace practitioners who had worked tirelessly to support it, they began trying new approaches and activities. Initially, the dominant model of engagement favored by many Israelis was to get to know the other side – in other words, "if we can only get to know them better, maybe we can make peace." Civil society peace efforts became somewhat displaced post-Oslo, as peace practitioners decided that "if we can't affect the larger picture, we will work on small things." After a further blow delivered by the failure of Camp David and the violent intifada, the peace camp started engaging in direct confrontation with the government, the settlers, the troops and the house demolition crews. These different forms of activities did not coalesce into a groundswell leading to a change at the political level. In retrospect, an international observer of the peace efforts argued that "there is no shared analysis of the conflict among the peace people, even inside the peace camp."

The Palestinian leader of a prominent women's NGO noted that her organization sustained its activities and vision through the tough times "because of its deep commitment. Joint initiatives that do not allow for honest and open dialogue about people's true political principles and identities are not helpful." She maintained that even after years of joint efforts, it was premature to talk about "normalized" relations between Palestinians and Israelis. An activist Israeli academic was more pessimistic, "People to people efforts were a failure. Several studies of this were done. The people to people initiatives failed for various reasons. One is that Israelis came thinking that all the political problems were solved and so they came to 'make a friend.'" Palestinians knowing their own current realities "came to convince Israelis to make concessions. The gap between expectations and reality was huge and disappointing to many." A Palestinian involved in joint efforts also queried: "People to people efforts are important for the larger peace process but only when the two are linked."

Few would argue that years of dialogue work helped establish relationships between some prominent civic leaders, but at the same time these encounters seemed to reinforce the critical asymmetries in the relationships between Palestinians and Israelis. One Palestinian commentator

put it bluntly: “Who is talking about peace? We would be fooling ourselves if we admit that there is a culture of peace today. Dialogue with Israelis is challenging. Where exactly do we differ? In earlier meetings, the Israeli peace camp pushed Palestinians: ‘Where is your peace camp?’ Palestinians felt that they have their very own vocabulary and model, it’s called intifada – ‘why can’t you accept it?’ Now the talk is more pragmatic because there are no masks. Israelis come to Palestinian universities to lecture Palestinians about the way Palestinians should see Israel. I challenge any Israeli university to invite Palestinians to lecture Israelis about Palestine. We work hard to educate within our society to diminish the enemy stereotype. They don’t. They don’t have to, they are the power. But their fear of us is deep.”

Some people argued that lessons from the post-Oslo era have not been learned and that disjointed and unproductive efforts continue today. The former head of an international peacebuilding NGO assessed the current state of affairs: “Civil society groups are not changing with the times and there is lots of ‘90s behavior in this decade and lots of wishful thinking. People are still doing Oslo type of work. Oslo was a failure for many reasons – one was because Oslo was working toward settlement and simultaneously in a post-conflict frame, which was wrong since the conflict still continues. Many groups operate in this post-conflict frame of mind which originates from the context that the Oslo peace process created and due to the outside influence through people-to-people funds, and as a result, this became an industry, a livelihood for many.” He described a cross-border health cooperation project that his organization implemented as an example of an intervention that brought people together to work on something very specific, tangible and practical and offered this analysis: “Joint projects are increasingly being seen as irrelevant by many in Palestine, and there is more support for them from the Israeli side. But still, there is space for and interest in public advocacy and public education and many recognize it. Media programs and documentary films produced are just one type of such effort, but there should be more and varied approaches.”

For the EU, evaluation efforts confirmed their concerns about effectiveness of people-to-people work, and they are no longer funding meetings for the sake of meetings or one-off dialogue events which have no follow-up plans. The PfP maintains that single identity work is critical and that joint or cross-border meetings by themselves would not be enough to bring change. However, there is still a very strong intuitive appeal to fund joint initiatives albeit after a careful assessment, as stated by the staff: “From years of experience and after the [2005] evaluation, we came to a conclusion that joint projects are most effective when people come together to work on a specific problem. Projects such as joint trauma work involving top psychologists from both sides, or environmental work involves people who would not usually come for ‘peace projects,’ but they come for collaboration on specific issues. These collaborative joint projects are more sustainable and produce concrete results in a form of something being resolved, or quality of life being improved for the community where the activity was focused. In the process, new relationships are built, communities are strengthened, perceptions are often shifted in ways that are not possible to achieve in a three hour dialogue session or a workshop, and many of these people are busy professionals and wouldn’t even come to a three hour workshop to begin with.”

The challenge of reaching out to the societal fringes and engaging “the disengaged” or the critics of peace is not unique to Israeli and Palestinian peace practitioners. However, in assessing cumulative impacts of peacebuilding efforts, peace practitioners and observers criticized the fact that most people-to-people initiatives targeted the educated elites, those conversant in English

and converted to the idea of dialogue and willing to talk to the other side. These projects, described as superficial, do not reach the Palestinians and Israelis who harbor different sets of opinions and are prone to disintegrate at the first incidence of violence. As one Palestinian peace advocate saw it, “Even youth summer camp projects weren’t able to reach deep into the society and used to bring only kids from elite families on both sides. Few reach or work with the poorest kids and families from the refugee camps.”

Today, Palestinians continue to see their situation as “living under an occupation,” while some Israelis continue to work towards “normalization.” This has led to deep feelings of resentment and subsequent pushback from some long-time partners. However, as one Palestinian observer argued, “people stopped talking and disregarded each other. But a few meetings continued, and people truly appreciated the strength of human relations. In an honest intellectual sense, there hasn’t been a shared analysis or understanding of the driving factors behind the conflict or the path towards resolution among the wider group of people working on these issues. The Geneva Initiative is possible and alive because we have a precise agreement that a Jewish state and a Palestinian have to exist independently of each other. There is no other way. That’s where we agree. We have not yet wanted to explore the ‘what if’ scenario. There is no expiry date on our dream for an independent Palestinian state. And we also don’t believe that total annihilation is possible, and people understand that a one state will be the end of a Zionist state solution.”

Shifts in Public Discourse and Terms of Discussion

Israelis and Palestinians are avid followers of news and after years of peace negotiations can trace the evolution of language, formal positions, the lifting of taboos and changes in perspectives that followed each attempt at peace. The Israeli representative for the Geneva Initiative offered this analysis of the significant shifts, “There is a big gap between what is in people’s minds and hearts: what they think and what they see. What they feel is desire for peace, but what they see is Qassam rockets, Hamas, settlements, checkpoints. But where we are now is closer to what Oslo was trying to reach than ever before. Leaders such as Olmert and Livni came into the political arena against Oslo, they are now the supporters for a Palestinian state. More people support the two-state solution than ever before. On issues such as division of the Jerusalem and right of return there was a shift from not wanting to talk at all, to talking about it differently – ‘right of return’ became ‘the solution to the refugee problem.’ But we are still paying the consequences of seven awful years during Sharon’s premiership, no dialogue, no partner, etc. We are still not there. We need less convincing about territorial division. We need to convince people that if you do not agree with this, you have to face the alternative. And the alternative is not a better agreement!”

While Israeli public has become more accepting of a two-state solution now than before, on the Palestinian side, a shift in perceptions and understanding of the situation leads people to talk about other outcomes, out of despair for the unrealized vision of a viable two-state solution. The recently published perspectives of several prominent Palestinians about the one-state solution (“one man, one vote”) have made Israelis, including those in the peace camp, feel threatened by the demographic consequences of such development. An Israeli commentator explained, “When Palestinians say, ‘we wanted for many years an independent Palestinian state, we wanted no settlements, we wanted East Jerusalem, but we didn’t get any of this. We lost. You won. Fine, build more settlements, but we are here to stay – it will be one state’ – this is extremely

threatening to the Israelis. This is a threat to Zionist ideals and to the Jewish state. In reality, Palestinians want an independent state, but there is faltering hope and commitment.” Another Israeli peace activist criticized the supporters of a one-state solution: “Who gave you the right to give up the Palestinian right for an independent state and to drop these national aspirations? A one state solution is not a solution; it will sustain the conflict over time. It also brings back the existentialist nature of the conflict. The Israeli public will not forfeit the Zionist dream of an independent Jewish state, just because Palestinians no longer want a two-state solution.”

There remain important areas where public opinion has not shifted sufficiently to produce a pragmatic choice for peaceful resolution. Israeli academic activist claimed, “what will bring about a peace settlement is the realization that the cost of the occupation is higher than the cost of maintaining settlements. Today, it’s a very cheap occupation. What we have is a *de facto* protectorate over the West Bank – Israel is the security and military provider, humanitarian needs are provided for by donors, and the rest is done by the proxy which is the PA.”

An Israeli professor explained the need for shifting the public discourse back to the issue of borders, noting that, “Anyone who wants to prepare policy positions for new Administration needs to acknowledge this [changed] situation [the shift from the conflict on borders to an ethnic conflict]. This includes peace activists, peace education people, raising public awareness, etc. Even international civic organizations need to push harder on switching the discourse back to borders.”

The Role of Outsiders in the Peace Process

Outsiders have played a significant role in Middle East peace efforts but people’s judgments of these third-party interventions have been mixed. People described different styles of engagement, such as the Norwegians preferring to “create space” and the Americans “forcing an agreement.” In the current reality, United States continues to be seen as a critical third party and one that both parties believe could indeed force an agreement and serve as a guarantor of peace. There is a feeling that due to loss of mutual confidence and traumatic events of the post-Oslo decade, Israelis and Palestinians cannot negotiate the peace on their own. We heard several people say “we need the international community to negotiate the settlement. Peace groups on both sides are very well aware of the need for US and EU to play a decisive role” and “an agreement can only happen if the Americans are intimately involved and design bridging proposals. The past peace processes failed partly because of timing and domestic issues: for example, Clinton started process late in his presidency, and Barak was coming from a minority government.” People hoped that the new US administration would get engaged early in its term with bridging proposals and will not wait until the end of the term as President Bush did.

The Role of Leadership

The decade of iconic political figures shaking hands and promising to deliver peace did not bring forth a lasting solution to this intractable conflict. Succeeding leaders were unable and unwilling to take hard choices and risks. Looking back at other potential change agents, a Palestinian peace advocate voiced his regrets about Moustafa Barghouti and Hanan Ashrawi and others whom he saw as amazing leaders and committed individuals who “lost their constituencies.” He added, “There has been a loss of hope. There’s no hope of agreement in near future.” Moreover,

the split between Hamas and Fatah indicates a crisis in national leadership that has a detrimental effect on the peace prospects and places any ongoing or future negotiation attempts under scrutiny since the Fatah leadership is unable to represent legitimately all of Palestinian interests. The critique of the Fatah leadership goes further, with one Palestinian observer stating that “[t]he peace agenda has been hijacked by a business like group. Fatah people today are enjoying their positions and salaries, why should they give it up?” On the Israeli side, the political alliances and divisions are even more complicated, with the religious conservatives, while in the minority, well-organized and forcefully opposed to concessions in the negotiation process. It is unlikely that the upcoming elections in Israel will transform these domestic imperatives, and most people forecast a return of conservatives and reduced commitment to peace talks.

Even while the Annapolis peace process continues, most people agree that neither side is blessed with a charismatic and persuasive leader able to consolidate the divergent interests of the multiple domestic constituencies and to deliver peace. Palestinians insist that if Israelis can’t reach an agreement with Abu Mazen and Salam Fayad, they will never reach it “because these are the most pragmatic leaders we got.” Among the pessimistic assessments, people suggested that in the event of Netanyahu’s election, the negotiations will stop and Track II efforts such as the Geneva Initiative will cease to be relevant in the absence of a negotiation process to support. The Geneva Initiative team insisted that if the next Israeli leader limits the parameters of negotiation to security and ceasefire agreements, this would be too limited and insufficient for a real end to the conflict in which case, many civic groups supporting negotiation efforts will withdraw.

VII. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of cumulative impacts of a range of peace efforts is a challenging task, especially in a conflict context where hundreds of domestic and third-party actors have been involved in a succession of peace processes and civic efforts over several decades. Even a cursory scan through recent articles and opinion pieces offers a rather disheartening picture of the current state of relations between the two sides. There is growing pessimism coupled with a recognition that relations between the two sides are slipping backwards based on real-time events such as continued increase in settlements and Gaza blockade. Polls indicate that there is an increasing acceptance of settlements in the wider Israeli public. The most vocal opposition to settlements, the Israeli peace camp, has been reduced to insignificant numbers and is unable to draw more than a few thousand people to its largest public demonstration (as opposed to 100,000 in the 1990s).

At the time of our field visit in June 2008, the Annapolis peace process was still on-going but we heard only a few people expressing timid hopes and many more voicing their disillusionment about prospects for a negotiated settlement by the end of 2008 or in the near future. Nevertheless, there was agreement among those interviewed that the peace process should continue with renewed energy and support from the United States. Renewed negotiations would only be fruitful if the leadership in Israel, Palestine and in the United States was strongly committed and backed by their multiple and diverse constituencies. The very people who spent years attempting to bring the two sides closer were pessimistic about this happening and feared

that, given the split between Fatah and Hamas and the return of conservatives to power in Israel, there will not be a successful negotiated solution, and occupation will continue.

The election of President Obama brought some glimmers of hope, but these were tempered by the subsequent consolidation of a largely conservative coalition government in Israel. On Israeli side, the swing to the right meant a step back from a genuine search for a comprehensive negotiated agreement in favor of “Economic Peace” within limited parameters of supporting economic growth in Palestinian territories but effectively dropping the issues around borders, sovereignty, Jerusalem’s status, and right of return.²⁹ At the time of finalizing this report in the Spring of 2010, United States envoy George Mitchell was attempting to resume “proximity talks” with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, both of whom insist on meeting with the U.S. envoy separately. After years of direct negotiations and mediation attempts this perhaps is the biggest indicator of how deep the relationship and trust between Israelis and Palestinians have deteriorated. Commentators insist that with the contours of a two-state solution well-known, the prospects for a peace deal are viable. The challenge remains to get the two parties to agree to it.

²⁹ R. Ahren, “Netanyahu: Economics, not politics, is the key to peace.” Published on Haaretz.com on 20.11.08. <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahu-economics-not-politics-is-the-key-to-peace-1.257617>

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