Activating the Arab Peace Initiative

The Palestinian Role

I. Problem analysis

- ISRAEL: Insufficient Incentive for a peaceful negotiated settlement of Arab-Israeli conflict that is acceptable to the Arab side and based on international law. ("Isr prefers living in secure but unrecognised borders to living in recognised but potentially insecure borders")
Political costs-benefit analysis (PCBA): Domestic and foreign pressure for a final status solution acceptable to the Arab side and based on international law currently lower than domestic political pressure against it. Strategic economic and political value of the Arab world is perceived as being negligible.
=> Maintaining the status quo (while either promoting a token process or claiming that there is no partner) is the most rational policy option

- KEY INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS (USA, EU) : Insufficient incentive to effectively intervene in the conflict, i.e. to increase political pressure on GoI to agree to a negotiated settlement.
PCBA: Political short-term costs are too high due too public preference for supporting Israel. Discourse about conflict continues to be dominated by Israeli official narrative ("Arab world = existential threat to Israel").
Benefits are too indirect, long-term and hard to measure. Strategic economic and political value of the Arab world is perceived as being negligible. Arab narratives remain marginal and lack credibility in public perception.
=> Restraint in dealing with GoI is the most rational policy option.

- PALESTINIANS / ARAB WORLD: The Arab side has tried a number of policies to achieve a favourable solution to the perennial conflict with Israel ranging from armed confrontation through oil embargoes and peace negotiations. Yet, none of these methods have yielded the desired results.
At the Beirut summit of March 2002, the Arab World has officially arrived at the international consensus regarding a just settlement to the Middle East conflict. The Arab Peace Initiative (API) constitutes the most compelling argument against the Israeli official narrative. Moreover, it has the potential of tilting the political cost-benefit equilibrium of key players and thus change the international parameters of the Middle East conflict.
=> In order to achieve this, the API must be operationalised and marketed in a much more targeted way and on a larger scale than has been done so far.

II. Aims

- mainstreaming the Arab Peace initiative in public discourse both throughout the Arab World and the West
("Not one sentence on the Middle East conflict that does not mention the API")

- changing public discourse on the Middle East conflict in Israel, North America and Europe by discrediting Israeli misuse of the security argument to disguise colonisation and apartheid. ("Showing the world who wants peace and who does not")

- raising the costs of non-intervention of key players in Middle East conflict (North America, Europe) by changing public perceptions

- reducing the political costs of agreeing to a negotiated solution within Israeli public by marketing opportunity and potential benefits of normalisation.

III. Measures

1. What needs to be done?
- linking up with the Arab and Palestinian Diaspora in North America and Europe
- linking up with the Arab world (esp. GCC, Arab League)
- linking up with like-minded civil society in Europe, North America and Israel
- reaching out to public opinion makers in Europe, North America and Israel
- reaching out to decision-makers in Europe and North America

2. Who can do it?

Palestinians are particularly well situated for such an endeavour since they
- are most directly affected and have the biggest stake in the conflict
- have closest knowledge of realities on the ground
- have a large and well educated Diaspora
- are able to talk to all sides.
As the only recognised representation of Palestinians around the world, the PLO is best suited to act as a hub for the aforementioned activities.
Building upon the structures of the NSU, a special task force should be created and commissioned to devise a long-term strategy and take implementing steps towards activating the API.

3. Concrete steps

Structure of the "Task Force for Activating the Arab Peace Initiative":

- ca. 10 experts from various European and North American countries with good knowledge of Arabic and the Arab world (possibly with Palestinian/Arab background, including at least one Palestinian from Israel)

- Experts should specialise on various countries/regions (e.g. USA, Canada, Central and Eastern Europe, France/Benelux, Germany, Southern Europe, UK)

- Their activities should focus on :

a. monitoring opinion shapers
- monitoring media and publicised opinion
- gathering publicly accessible information on opinion shapers (journalists, politicians, diplomats, lobbyists etc.) using IT databases

b. identifying and linking up with potential allies
- establishing networks with like-minded multipliers within civil society, the Arab/Palestinian diaspora, Arab and Western State institutions (government, parliament, foreign missions)
- identifying possibilities for co-operation with potential donors
(This would include extensive travel for at least part of the team)

c. developing a short and medium-term media strategy for marketing the API
- identify needs and possibilities for effectively reaching out to media, opinion shapers and decision-makers (using information gathered through media monitoring)

d. devising a strategy for establishing a permanent structure ("Arab Peace Institute")
- In order to ensure sustainability of the project, the creation of an institutionalised structure should be envisaged.
- Such an "Arab Peace Institute" should possibly have representations / partners in all major European and North American capitals (including Eastern Europe).