

## The Three Roles of the Arab Peace Initiative

In the current context, almost 13 years after its initiation and after the passing away of King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia who originally initiated the API, the Arab Peace Initiative is seen to have the following three roles:

**First: Getting the Israeli political arena to move forwards on accepting the API as a point of departure to a comprehensive Middle East peace, starting from the operationalization of it in the Israeli-Palestinian track.**

**Second: Use the good offices of the API Follow-Up Committee to elevate Palestine to statehood internationally, in order to create better symmetrical position to the Palestinians with Israel in any future negotiations.**

**Third: Call for an API based regional approach that can play the role of support for the Palestinians and present incentives to Israel in order to move the peace process forward.**

The main significance of the API is in its presentation as an initiative that represents the consensus of all the 22 Arab countries (and subsequently all 57 Islamic countries) making it a plan of all Arab countries and not only so-called ‘moderate Arab countries’. Therefore the Israeli acceptance of the API will lead to a comprehensive peace with all the Arab (and Islamic) countries regardless of their ideological differences.

Upon that, it should be stated clearly that the calls made nowadays to use the API to ally with moderate Arab countries against the extremist ones and against Iran is a non-starter; additionally, it contradicts with the internal logic of the API itself.

**The API is about comprehensive peace between Israel and all the Arab and Islamic countries with the Israeli withdrawal of all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories of 1967; it is not by any means about allying with some Arab countries in order to wage hostility or a war against other Arab or Islamic countries.**

Furthermore, the API cannot be used to bring in Arab countries to insert pressure on the Palestinians to make compromises. President Abbas and the Palestinian leadership have already made all the concessions needed, yet the response by Israel has been more settlement expansion and more extremist positions in contradiction to any agreement with the Palestinian leadership.

Therefore pressure of the API should be placed on Israel and not the Palestinians. One way to do so is by elevating Palestine in the UN to create better negotiation position for the Palestinians with Israel in any coming negotiations, in addition to other incentives (both positive and negative) that the Arabs can use to move the Israeli stances forward.

The Arab League created two mechanisms for the API promotion/implementation: firstly by delegating Egypt and Jordan to communicate the API with Israel, in which both countries have carried out countless efforts and it is about high time Israel reciprocated instead of presenting proposals highlighting the use of the API as a point of departure to normalize relations with some Arab countries against others.

The second mechanism consists of the API Follow-Up Committee taking responsibility to communicate the API with the international community. This committee met 5 times with the US Secretary of State John Kerry during the last 9 months-round of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Recently they met twice in Cairo on 29/11/2014 and 15/01/2015.

During unilateral meetings and ones with John Kerry, the API Follow-Up Committee focused on the issue of elevating Palestine in the international arena in order to give it better symmetrical position on the negotiations table with Israel. Statements and actions of the Committee testify to this. Thus, calling the Committee to act in order to pressure the Palestinians is contradictory to what the Committee itself is already doing. Moreover, this demand to pressure is too much to be asked for when the API has been around for 13 years without a positive Israeli response. In actuality, what is needed is positive responses from Israel rather than pressure on the Palestinians to compromise.

Finally, an API-based regional envelope can be created to serve as an umbrella for the Palestinian-Israeli bilateral negotiations. Such a regional envelope will not be a forum for alternative negotiations with Israel as Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Liberman wanted. Neither should regional negotiations be conducted in parallel to bilateral negotiations leading to Arab-Israeli normalization before the Israeli withdrawal or another round of controversy similar to the one of the 1990's Multilateral Working Groups on what would come first: normalization or withdrawal? Subsequently, such controversy led to the collapse of the Multilateral Working Groups.

The "alternative" then is a bilateral Palestinian-Israeli negotiations supported by a regional API-based umbrella that works in concerted efforts with the Quartet for Middle East peace as was emphasized in a statement by the Quartet itself last week as a result of its meeting in Brussels.

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