

DIALOGICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR RESCUING THE OBAMA PEACE INITIATIVE IN THE ISRAELI- PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

THE NEED TO PROMOTE AGONISTIC DIALOGUE AND A STRATEGIC
ENGAGEMENT OF DISCOURSES WHEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION FAILS

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The aim of this posting on Polity's *Contemporary Conflict Resolution Third Edition* website is to bring chapter 18 (Managing Linguistic Intractability: Dialogue, Discourse and Radical Disagreement) up to date to the time of the Palestinian application for full membership of the United Nations in September 2011.

Abstract

In intractable conflicts, when dialogue for political accommodation (elite settlement) and dialogue for mutual understanding (societal transformation) prove premature, look in the opposite direction and promote agonistic dialogue (a strategic engagement of discourses). Not less radical disagreement, but more. This has been the main missing communicative ingredient in Obama's Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative. Without it the enterprise was doomed to failure. If meaningful talks are to be revived in future this is an essential lesson to learn. In particular, the whole issue of negotiation must itself to be seen to be part of the struggle. Palestinians want the declared *outcome* of bilateral negotiations - a fully sovereign Palestinian state based on 1967 borders - but reject the *process* as a twenty year means by which Israel has perpetuated occupation and rendered such an outcome progressively less possible. Israelis want the *process* of bilateral negotiation as the only vehicle for any peace initiative because they can control it, but do not want the full *outcome*. This is the challenge facing would-be third party peacemakers, who need to recognise that they are thereby themselves part of the discursive struggle. It is a challenge that so far the Obama administration has been signally unable or unwilling to confront. Start from where conflict parties are, not from where would-be peacemakers want them to be.

Introduction

At the time of the original writing of this paper (June 2011) in the view of most of those involved in the region, the two-year Obama peace plan in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had already failed. More seriously, there was a widespread perception, particularly among Palestinians, that the entire twenty-year attempt to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through bilateral negotiations had come to an end. Instead, for some time now, Palestinians had been looking for an alternative integrated national strategy around which all Palestinians could rally, made up of unilateral and multilateral initiatives that did not depend on Israeli approval or on constraints imposed by third parties from outside, including the US. The recent remarkable events associated with the Arab Spring were seen to have had added a powerful impetus to this process.

At the time of posting this paper on the *Contemporary Conflict Resolution Third Edition* website (September 2011), the Palestinian President has now lodged a formal claim for recognition and full UN membership of a Palestinian State to the UN Security Council in the teeth of strong Israeli and US opposition. The outcome is still unclear. But this change in Palestinian strategy was already evident more than three years ago to anyone who paid attention to the first stage of what this paper calls 'dialogue for strategic engagement' - the formal aspect of the agonistic dialogue that constitutes the key element in the radical disagreement at the heart of the conflict. Appreciating this and taking it seriously should from the outset have been a core ingredient in the Obama peace initiative.

Dialogue for strategic engagement operates at three levels - *within conflict parties, between conflict parties, and between third party peacemakers and conflict parties*. These are looked at in turn.

LEVEL 1: INCLUSIVE INTERNAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE WITHIN CONFLICT PARTIES

Internal division makes external accommodation between conflict parties more difficult. So this is the starting point. The strategic engagement of discourses begins, not with external dialogue *between* conflict parties, but with inclusive dialogue *within* them. At the moment, after years of disillusionment, few Israelis or Palestinians are ready for the former. As possessors most Israelis do not see the need for substantial concessions in negotiations and regard Palestinians as unreliable dialogue partners. Their concerns are with the wider region (Iran, Egypt, Syria), not the territories that they already sufficiently control since the putting down of the al-Aqsa intifada. As challengers most Palestinians equate both formal negotiation and informal dialogue with the normalisation of occupation. On the other hand both Israelis

and Palestinians have a strong motive to pursue inclusive internal dialogue, because of the fear that internal disunity undermines the national project and in order to galvanise as many as possible to participate in it. This is what enables the first stage of dialogue for strategic engagement to be promoted even under the most severe political constraints. Inclusive internal dialogue means that a cross-section of participants from different constituencies takes part and the ongoing analysis is fed back into the national debate.

And the purpose of the internal dialogue is not *hermeneutic* (mutual understanding with the other), but *strategic* (how to win). Full account is taken of the systemic complexity of the conflict environment, but the aim is to determine whether there can be a coherent national plan, how the internal unity required to formulate and execute it is to be attained, and what the most effective resulting strategy will be. This is another reason why such dialogue can survive when other forms of communication break down.

Yet even on this minimal basis dialogue for strategic engagement can keep channels of communication open otherwise not available, and can maximise chances of a future revival of dialogue for political engagement (settlement) and dialogue for mutual understanding (transformation) - as demonstrated below.

This will be illustrated, first by the outcome of an attempt to promote inclusive internal Palestinian strategic dialogue, then by the result of a similar attempt with Israelis. Because only the former led to a documented outcome - and also because of space constraint - the Palestinian example will be given in more detail than the Israeli example.

Inclusive internal Palestinian strategic debate - the evolution of a new Palestinian strategy

Over the past six years the centre of gravity of Palestinian strategic thinking has evolved to the point where it is now in process of rapid systemic change. This can be charted through the work of the Palestine Strategy Group (PSG) since 2006. The PSG is an inclusive and open forum in which up to 100 Palestinians from across the social and political spectrum have conducted sustained strategic analysis of the complex conflict environment in order to help inform and guide the national project. The first three year phase of the PSG's work (2006-8), supported by the Oxford Research Group and funded by the European Union, was completed on the eve of the advent of the new Obama administration with the production of the report *Regaining the Initiative* (September 2008). The second phase (2009-11), also supported by the Oxford Research Group but now funded by the Norwegian government, has drawn on discussions held at workshops in Jericho and Gaza in 2010, and in Istanbul in March 2011 to produce the report *A Palestine Liberation Strategy* (about to be published at the time of writing) from which this brief outline is derived. Together with parallel inclusive internal strategic dialogue in Israel (conducted by the Israeli Strategic Forum (ISF), but not reproduced here) this

gives a graphic illustration of why the Obama peace initiative has so far failed, and a clear indication of what needs to happen in the dialogic sphere if there is to be any hope that it may succeed in future.¹

The whole of this section should be read as a summary of *Regaining the Initiative* and *A Palestine Liberation Strategy*. The voice is that of Palestinians, not the author. Since this was written the full report has been released and can be found at www.palestinestrategygroup.ps (including list of participants).

The starting point for the new Palestinian strategy is that the strategic option of bilateral negotiation with Israel - at the centre of international efforts to resolve the conflict for nearly twenty years - is over for the foreseeable future and has been ended by Israel:

As is now patently obvious to all, Israel has no intention of negotiating for a genuine Palestinian state on any of the historic Palestinian lands. On the contrary, the strategic purpose of the continuing illegal Israeli colonisation of our land is to ensure that this will never happen - not even on the mere 22% of mandate Palestine left after 1949 and occupied by Israel after 1967. Israelis want to deny to Palestinians the very basis in religion, ethics and international law on which their own claims to statehood fundamentally rest - the internationally recognised collective right of peoples to a national homeland, to self-determination, and to independence. It is we, the Palestinians, who have no negotiating partner. (*A Palestine Liberation Strategy*, August 2011, English version)

This has precipitated the Palestinian search for alternatives to bilateral negotiations that are not dependent on Israeli and Quartet conditionalities. These must be integrated into a coherent national strategy that commands the support of as many Palestinians as possible if it is to be effective.

When the first draft of the report was completed in April 2011 there was seen to be a 6 to 12 month window of opportunity for this process driven by three events that converged in September 2011 (the end of the period originally assigned by Obama for his Middle East deal, the end of the period allotted by the PA Prime Minister for Palestinian internal infrastructure and institution building, and the next annual UN General Assembly meeting at which the stated intention was to seek international recognition for a Palestinian state), and by the one year time-frame for interim technocratic government and preparation for Palestinian elections envisaged in the Cairo agreement between Hamas and Fatah. The danger was seen to be that internal political preoccupations and power struggles during this period triggered by the latter might deflect attention from the formulation, development and implementation of national strategy at this crucial time. So the aim of the PSG was and is to help ensure that this does not happen.

The PSG identifies two *strategic prerequisites*. These can be seen to coincide with the two key moves that launch the strategic engagement of discourses process as outlined above.

The first prerequisite is 'strategic unity', defined not in terms of particular domestic political outcomes (it is no business of the PSG to become immersed in internal Palestinian politics), but as sufficient commonality to make a popularly supported national strategy possible. Internal political differences must not undercut external strategic effectiveness. There has been near unanimity on this in the PSG from the outset, reflecting a powerful national impulse that goes far towards explaining the recent Cairo reconciliation agreement.

The second prerequisite is the linked need for sustained and inclusive strategic thinking itself that is carefully calibrated, flexible, and takes proper account of the systemic complexity of the conflict environment. The touchstone of strategic thinking is not 'is this theoretically ideal', but 'does it work?'. This is seen by the PSG to have been missing in the past with highly damaging consequences for the Palestinian national cause. The requirement of inclusivity in formulating and communicating this thinking is seen as essential if maximum participation by all Palestinians in the national effort is to be achieved.

Within this framework the paper *Regaining the Initiative* launched the PSG process in 2008 with an analysis of *strategic scenarios*, possible futures that shape strategic thinking by relating preferred and un-preferred future outcomes to the question of relative capacity to promote or block them. Strategic scenarios relate desirability (Palestinian preference) to attainability (the interests and relative power of major players). The shifting relationship between desirability and attainability defines short-term and long-term strategic goals and the relationships between them. The PSG set out four strategic scenarios more or less acceptable to Palestinians, and four scenarios unacceptable to Palestinians, and then analysed the capacity to bring these about or to block them that is available to Palestinians, to Israelis, and to the international community. This is an elaborate ongoing analysis that lies at the heart of and shapes the strategic engagement of discourses process throughout. It will not be further elaborated here. But the scenarios that were identified are as follows.

Scenarios acceptable to many or most Palestinians

- (1) A fully sovereign State of Palestine on 1967 borders with Al Quds as its capital and a just settlement that honours the right of return of Palestinian refugees.
- (2) A single bi-national state for Israelis and Palestinians.
- (3) A single liberal democratic state in which all citizens are treated equally under the law.
- (4) A federation between Israel, Palestine, and perhaps Jordan.

Other possibilities were also considered, including scenarios that transcend the whole concept of the nation state itself.

Scenarios not acceptable to Palestinians

(5) Perpetual sham negotiations as a mask for continuing illegal Israeli settlement on Palestinian land.

(6) A quasi-Palestinian state with temporary borders and limited sovereignty, permanently under the effective control of Israel.

(7) Unilateral separation by Israel with imposed borders, including forced population movements dictated by Israel.

(8) Gaza absorbed by Egypt and the West Bank absorbed by Jordan, or other such permutations.

Again, other possibilities were discussed.

The conclusion of *Regaining the Initiative* is that Palestinians can and will block all four of the scenarios (5) to (8), no matter what the cost. This is a key element in Palestinian strategy in relation to Israel, because it is the erroneous Israeli belief that these alternatives are perpetually available that is seen to remove any Israeli inducement to negotiate seriously in the first place. A major aim of the new Palestinian strategy, therefore, is to eliminate this belief. Understanding this has to be a starting point for any third party wanting to enter the arena as a peacemaker.

Within this nexus of desirability/feasibility Palestinian *national strategic objectives* can then be specified.

All PSG members agree that Palestinian strategic objectives are to end Israeli occupation/colonisation of the land occupied after 4 June 1967, to lift the siege of Gaza, to obtain redress under UN resolutions and international law for Palestinian refugees, and to achieve equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel. There are differing interpretations of these objectives. The preponderant view remains that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and a solution to the refugee issue according to international law (scenario (1)) remains the immediate national strategic goal. Some PSG members ultimately prefer scenarios (2) or (3), but there is a readiness to unite behind (1) so long as it remains the case that this is the most feasible scenario, and above all that it is the one that receives maximum international support. If it comes to it, there is agreement that the final decision will be made in a national referendum, and that all political parties will then accept the outcome.

Differing interpretations of national strategic objectives are seen to be normal in democracies and are to be welcomed - Israelis differ similarly about Israeli strategic objectives, including major differences within the coalition

government and even within single parties such as Likud. Indeed, it was pointed out in the PSG that these are used by the Israeli government on occasion to argue that concessions must be made in negotiations in order to make internal Israeli agreement possible. And different interpretations are not in the end necessarily mutually exclusive. They can be accommodated as short-, medium- and long-term goals, and will shift in relation to the changing strategic environment and to alterations in the feasibility of the strategic scenarios that inform them. For example, scenarios (2) and (3) may be likely in the event to degenerate into some form of scenario (1), albeit probably by more bloody means. While scenario (1) might turn out to be the quickest route, via scenario (4), to an eventual approximation to scenarios (2) and (3), albeit in different ways to those envisaged at the moment. These are all possible futures. They do not emerge clearly, are not analysed properly, and do not enter mainstream dialogue seriously if inclusive national strategic discourses do not substantially engage each other. Discussion of 'one state' or 'two state' 'solutions' lack substance and strategic import unless these alternatives are fully clarified, compared and argued out, as emphasised further below.

In particular, if scenario (1) were to prove unattainable, then this would clearly transform the desirability/attainability ratios in general from a Palestinian perspective, and therefore the strategic objectives dependent on them. Other scenarios would automatically be elevated above it and immediate strategic objectives would change.

At the core of the as yet unpublished 2011 *A Palestine Liberation Strategy* is an analysis of *strategic options* available for pursuing these Palestinian national goals. Strategic options link strategic objectives to strategic means and to the tactics to be employed in implementing the strategy. They are alternative modes of action, like different paths to a goal. The paths need not be mutually exclusive and can in combination lead to the same end, but sometimes there may be a fork in the road where key strategic choices have to be made. For example, in the case of the six broad clusters of strategic options listed below, the first option (A) is seen by the PSG at the time of writing to be cancelled, although it may be revived on an entirely different basis at a later date. The second to fifth options (B) to (E) are seen by the PSG to work together to constitute the core of the new national strategy. The sixth option (F) is not yet favoured by the PSG, nor is it immediately feasible. And it is incompatible with option (B). But option (F) is likely to become the key option by default if the present national strategy fails (Plan B).

The six strategic options can be briefly listed as follows.

(A) A possible eventual return to bilateral negotiation

Given the perceived failure of the bilateral negotiation option, the new strategy is reconstructed on a basis that returns at least as far as the 1988 PLO/PNC declaration of independence, before the twenty-year period of intermittent bilateral negotiation began in 1991. The future possibility of a return to bilateral negotiation is held open - but only on terms set out below. The main

point is the view that the process of bilateral negotiation as hitherto conducted under US/Quartet auspices has been one of the main means by which Israel retains control and ensures that a Palestinian state never materialises. Israel does not want the declared purpose of the talks, but does want their perpetual if intermittent possibility as the only path to peace, continually seeking to blame Palestinians for their breakdown. This worked for Israel in 2000 given active US support. But failed in 2010, when continuing Israeli settlements are widely seen to have been responsible. Third party peacemakers need to understand how the very option of bilateral negotiation is thus part of the struggle. If it is to be revived in future, the Palestinian strategy is to ensure that it does not play the role it has played in the past. It will have to be recast within an entirely different strategic-political context.

(B) Internal political renewal and institution building

This is the first of the four linked strategic options that make up the new Palestine Liberation Strategy. The PSG identifies three main functions for Palestinian political institutions during the interim period prior to the setting up of a Palestinian state - service provider for Palestinians in the occupied territories, organiser of national resistance to continuing occupation and settlement (see strategic option (D)), and embryonic future national government. There are tensions between these functions, and the PA in its present form is not seen to be able to fulfil them all, as noted below.

But the main function of strategic option (B) is to underpin strategic option (C) - the eliciting of international recognition for an independent Palestinian state. Strategic option (C) is posited on a clear demonstration that Palestinians are already fully ready internally to assume the status of responsible self-government. This is extremely difficult to achieve under occupation, and while Palestinians are subject to severe international pressure to conform to externally imposed behaviours. The familiar 'catch-22' has been that Palestinians have been seen to be 'not ready for independence', because they have been prevented by occupation from being independent. The aim of strategic option (B) is to demonstrate that Palestinians have done as much as is in their power to demonstrate a capacity for responsible governance in accordance with international criteria for statehood, and that where this lies beyond their power - including control of much of the territory in question - this is the responsibility of the occupying power, Israel. This will increase international pressure on Israel to comply.

(C) Eliciting regional and international support and recognition

Strategic option (C) now moves centre stage. The PSG sees regional and international support as the main 'balancer' or 'equaliser' against Israeli military preponderance. International legitimacy is in the long run a more potent force. The crucial battleground is international law, and collective and individual human rights. In the wake of the Arab Spring, despite temporary internal preoccupations, regional support for the Palestinian cause is seen to be greatly enhanced. Already the ongoing revolution in Egypt is proving to be transformative. And there is perceived to be preponderant and growing wider

international support - including increasingly in Europe - that recognises the unchallengeable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and thinks that what Israel is currently doing, particularly over settlement building, is illegitimate. This is an arena where Palestinians have been making substantial advances in recent years, to the point where Israeli strategists are seriously worried and at a loss to know how to counter this accelerating trend.

A key focus here was the campaign to build international recognition of a fully independent Palestinian state based on 4 June 1967 borders. When the bilateral negotiation route is blocked, the main alternative is international adjudication. A widespread view in the PSG was that the Obama administration will be able to do little before the next US presidential elections, and that a key focus should be on Europe. Discussion over the past two years centred on the possibility of appeals to (a) individual states, (b) the UN Security Council despite an expected US veto, (c) the UN General Assembly if necessary under UNGA Resolution 377 (Uniting for Peace, November 1953), and of recourse to (d) trusteeship of Gaza and the West Bank given to the UN perhaps under the Special Committee on Decolonisation via GAR 1514 (December 1960), because what is at issue is not just occupation, which comes under the third Geneva convention among other legal instruments, but also active colonisation through continuing illegal settlement on Palestinian land. The foundations for Palestinian claims in international law are UNSCR 242 and 338. There was clear recognition of the danger that premature attempts at recognition might do more harm than good if they merely result in acknowledgement of existing PA areas of control (only 42% of 22%), thus freezing the current situation. Highly informed advice on international law must be taken throughout.

(D) Smart resistance

'Smart resistance' is a term coined in the earlier PSG report *Regaining the Initiative* (2008) (in that document it was described as a 'strategic means' rather than a strategic option). Smart resistance refers to the intelligent, carefully focused, and flexible use of the various sub-components that constitute the broad strategic option of national resistance in general, so that these operate together within a unified national strategy, and are only taken up or dropped when they are seen to be effective or ineffective/counter-productive in relation to the national liberation effort as a whole. There is inevitably legitimate controversy here and room for further inclusive Palestinian discussion.

Smart resistance includes a range of sub-options such as BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) campaigns, which PSG members consider to be entirely legitimate and generally effective in putting pressure on Israel until it fulfils Palestinian human rights as set out in the 2005 Civil Society Call.

But in light of the extraordinary demonstrations of the power of mass non-violent civil popular protest, often in the face of security brutality, evidenced in the ongoing 'Arab Spring', it is the key role of popular resistance and struggle that has been the central element in PSG discussions, not just in the Istanbul

meeting, but also, presciently, in Jericho and Gaza earlier in 2010. It is noted in this regard how Palestinian popular resistance has over many years led the way in the Arab world, as is widely acknowledged within popular democratic movements elsewhere. Palestinians have been the pioneers. Nevertheless, the full force of this strategic option was only partially exploited even in the first intifada, and is seen as a vast and largely untapped resource waiting to be incorporated as a potent rocket-booster to power the new Palestine Liberation Strategy. Only the full and united resources of the whole Palestinian people, diplomatic, advocacy, media, civil society, coordinated as much via the social networks as by formal party organisations, and sustained for as long as is required, can generate sufficient force to drive the new Palestine Liberation Strategy through to the eventual attainment of Palestinian national goals. In this task Palestinian civil society needs to engage with and elicit support from the wider capacities and energies of Arab civil society in general.

The PSG discussed the role of armed resistance in relation to all of this. Armed resistance is seen as a legitimate tool of national liberation movements in international law. A number in the PSG regard this as an essential 'equaliser' and argue that Israel will not be made to cooperate bilaterally unless the military imbalance is corrected (examples cited include the Yom Kippur war leading to the Egyptian agreement, Hezbollah attacks in relation to Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, etc.). Others - probably a majority - think that this is not the moment to re-emphasise the armed struggle, because it plays to Israel's strength and provides Israeli right wing elements with propaganda tools to justify the use of force. A counter-argument here is that when Israel is provoked into using military force, as in Lebanon and Gaza, this rebounds on Israel in propaganda terms because of the far greater number of Palestinian civilians - especially women and children - killed and injured. There was a strong feeling in the PSG that attacks on civilians should play no part in the new Palestine Liberation Strategy, because this is in clear breach of international law, which is what Palestinian strategy mainly appeals to. Attacks on civilians do more than anything else to alienate international opinion.

(E) Framing the issues: winning the war of words

The fifth strategic option is greatly to enhance the resources and sophistication of the Palestinian discursive offensive against Israel in all arenas and modes of operation. Strategic option (E) is seen to underpin all the others. The tangible pay-off in terms of power to attain concrete political goals through command of means of communication, particularly the new electronic and social media, is seen to have been manifest in the recent convulsions in the region. This is regarded as a great source of strength for Palestinians as noted above. Palestinians are seen to be patently winning the war of words. And the new Palestine Liberation Strategy aims to ensure that this continues to gather an unstoppable momentum.

Beneath all this is seen to be the fundamental element that undergirds the whole Palestinian discursive offensive.

It must all the time be made clear throughout that this is not just a public relations exercise. Underneath our Palestinian discourse lie undeniable *facts* of forcible dispossession, and incontrovertible *principles* of collective and individual rights. The discursive struggle is not between two symmetric and equally legitimate 'narratives', Israeli and Palestinian. At the heart of our discourse is not a mere subjective 'Palestinian view'. It is a bitterly lived reality endured by the Palestinian people for more than 60 years. For example even today most people in other parts of the world do not know the simple fact that '1967 borders' means an Israeli state on 78% of historic Palestine despite an originally much smaller population, or that 'Israeli settlements' means progressive colonisation of the remaining 22% - to the point where an independent State of Palestine becomes impossible. When they do hear about this most people are outraged at the scale of the injustice. It is our job to make sure that they do hear about it. (English version of *PLS*, 2011)

The argument that 'Israelis want to deny to Palestinians the very basis in religion, ethics and international law on which their own claims to statehood fundamentally rest - the internationally recognised collective right of peoples to a national homeland, to self-determination, and to independence' is seen to be ethically, legally - and therefore politically - incontrovertible. In the long run, not just for demographic reasons, but above all for moral and principled reasons, underscored by universally recognised international norms, the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence must and will prevail. This is seen to trump all other considerations. Palestinians will win because their cause is just.

(F) Dissolving the Palestinian Authority and returning to direct Israeli rule: Plan B

The sixth strategic option is the default option in case the new Palestine Liberation Strategy fails. The PSG spent some time discussing the difficulties involved in transforming the PNA (Palestine National Authority or PA for short) into a PRA (Palestine Resistance Authority) or into an embryonic transitional government for a future independent Palestinian state as already mentioned (in its current form the PA is not seen to be able to fulfil these functions). This included the idea of renewing the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation)/PNC (Palestine National Council) (which can represent all Palestinians, including those living in Israel and the diaspora), a discussion omitted here. But what about the option of the PA just continuing indefinitely as it is at the moment? Is this an acceptable option? What if the new national strategy fails? In that case would the PA simply carry on administering the occupied territories and keeping them quiet without cost to Israel? Would it linger on as little more than a local municipal authority?

This introduces the sixth strategic option - dissolving the PA and returning control of its duties to Israel. The provincial keys would be handed back, because the PA would no longer want to bear responsibility for the

occupation. Dismantling the Authority would expose the occupation/colonisation for what it is, and place the cost and burden on Israel. Because scenario (1) would now be defunct and unobtainable, Palestinians would automatically replace it with scenarios (2) or (3) - or some variation of these. This is Plan B.

The implications of Plan B are extensive. It would represent a seismic change in Palestinian national strategy in which even the PLO/PNC 1988 declaration of independence is superseded. The 1949/67 border would no longer be seen as significant and the national struggle would shift decisively into a fight for equality of rights - individual and collective. The entire resistance effort would be poured into the demand for civic equality throughout the whole of Palestine - or perhaps a one-state two-nation outcome. This would make the Palestinian struggle more akin to the fight against apartheid in South Africa.

At the moment the PSG does not advocate such a move. There are severe criticisms of the option of dissolving the PA, for example that the resulting outcome without a clear alternative would be filled by Israel in a manner that would advance its aims of permanent settlement, economic dominance and political control. Loss of employment as a result of dismantling the PA would cause great suffering to Palestinians. And the return of full occupation could be very dangerous in the long run, as it could lead to the absorption of Palestinian territory into Israel, the relegation of the population to subservient status, unilateral redrawing of borders, intensified emigration of Palestinians together with forced population displacement, and an end to any attempt to resolve the refugee situation.

But what other option will there be if the new national strategy fails? Not to dissolve the PA in those circumstances would be harmful - equivalent to accepting permanent dominance by the occupying power. If the PA cannot meet its basic responsibilities - such as ensuring that Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are able to move freely through Palestinian territory, or that new Palestinian villages or cities can be built without Israeli permission - it would be dishonourable for the PA to retain authority. The only honourable course of action will be to refuse to go on playing that game. There will be no alternative.

The key point emphasised in the PSG - which makes Plan B already integral to the new Palestinian strategy - is the fact that strategically Israel must be made to understand clearly now why, since Palestinians will never accept scenarios (5) to (8), the failure of the new strategy will automatically lead to the dissolution of the PA together with all its consequences - whatever the risks and costs. Scenarios (5) to (8) simply will not be accepted by Palestinians. Instead there will be endless conflict, suffering, radicalisation and regional instability, and by far the greatest threat, not just to the legitimacy of the State of Israel, but to its very existence. And this will have been brought about by Israel itself. Only when Israeli decision makers finally come to understand that the progressive international delegitimisation of Israel is not being brought about by malign enemies intent on its destruction, but is an inevitable consequence of its own current strategy - will it begin to become

likely that that strategy will change. This is the main message that the PSG would like to convey to third parties - particularly third party peacemakers - in the hope that they will then shift their priorities accordingly.

The rest of *A Palestine Liberation Strategy* specifies what needs to be done over the next 6 to 12 months to convert the mix of preferred strategic options into a fully integrated programme. This is then summed up in the form of seven questions as a contribution to the Palestinian national debate:

<u>Formulating the PLS</u>	How can options (B) to (E) be best combined into a coherent and effective strategy for national liberation?
<u>Strategic Authority</u>	How can the necessary internal strategic unity be attained?
<u>Strategic Context</u>	How can sufficient regional and international support be gained?
<u>Strategic Resistance</u>	How can smart resistance be most effectively organised and inspired?
<u>Strategic Discourse</u>	How can we ensure that the Palestinian discourse prevails wherever the question of the Palestinian future is discussed?
<u>The Strategic Opponent</u>	How can current Israeli strategies be countered, and how can Israelis be persuaded that a genuine settlement along the lines suggested in this report is also in their own best interests?
<u>Preparing Plan B</u>	How can plan B at the same time be formulated in case Plan A fails, and in such a way as to help ensure that Plan A does not fail?

Before moving on to the Israeli example, I will use this outline of an emerging new Palestinian strategy for national liberation to show how, although its aim is strategic victory, not political accommodation (agreement) or mutual understanding (transformation), it can nevertheless provide crucial information and opportunities for would-be peacemakers - in this case the Obama administration - seeking to expedite or revive bilateral negotiations during periods of severe political attrition. In at least six regards it 'mimics' the other forms of dialogue, which is why it is able to act as 'placeholder' for them even when they themselves as yet gain no purchase.

- (1) Internal strategic thinking looks to the future, not the past. Third parties can build on this.
- (2) Internal strategic thinking aims to be inclusive. Internal hegemony may resist this and the internal disagreements (including within the

- diaspora) are often more intense than those between the conflict parties. But there is an overwhelming popular motive to search for sufficient internal agreement to underpin an effective national strategy. This offers third parties a chance to influence internal constituencies accordingly. This may help mitigate the internal divisions within the conflict parties that make political accommodation between them so difficult. And it also opens the possibility of encouraging and influencing engagement between majorities on either side not otherwise available.
- (3) Internal strategic thinking has to take account of systemic complexity in order to be effective. Desirability is balanced against attainability. This may help to temper unrealistic wish-lists. Informed third parties can use this to encourage conflict parties to think longer-term and to move beyond short-term crisis management.
 - (4) Internal strategic thinking continually assesses strategic means in terms of effectiveness. Both violent resistance and violent repression can always be challenged on the grounds that they do not work as well as non-violent alternatives in relation to the attainment of strategic goals. This opens a critical space for possible third party persuasion.
 - (5) Internal strategic thinking looks at the chessboard from the perspective of the opponent, not in order to sympathise, but in order to win. This allows third parties to promote and influence strategic interchange even under severe political attrition.
 - (6) Internal strategic thinking seeks ways of communicating effectively with domestic supporters, with political opponents at both elite and societal levels, and with third parties. This offers third party peacemakers detailed ongoing information about where and how pressure is best applied, and provides recurrent openings to apply it.

Inclusive internal Israeli strategic debate - the hardening of opposition to a Palestinian state

Given space constraint, this account of an attempt to promote inclusive internal Israeli strategic thinking will be brief. It was also - unsurprisingly - highly dissimilar to the Palestinian case, both because of the entirely different (and changing) make-up of Israeli politics and society, and because of the quantitative and qualitative asymmetry in terms of economic and military power and state/non-state status.

During the first phase of the project (2006-8) Israelis were more concerned about the values and nature of Israel on its 60th anniversary than about the Palestinian question, focusing on distinctions between Jewishness (cultural Jewish identity), Zionism (national Jewish identity) and Judaism (religious Jewish identity). Four possible future scenarios were discussed, but not evaluated strategically:

A Jewish Home - from the Jordan to the Mediterranean

A Jewish state in which Israel resumes full control in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), the demographic influence of National Religious and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups increases. Palestinians have full residential rights (personal and cultural) but not full political rights. Militant Palestinians are suppressed with severe violence.

Two Homes for Two Peoples - Good Neighbours:

Two states for two people in which it is recognised that without a partition of the land between Palestinians and Jews the outcome will be the creation of an untenable bi-national state between the Jordan and the Sea. A multinational force safeguards the security of Jewish populations on Palestinian territory, while in Israel efforts are made to close social gaps by including Israeli-Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox Jews in governmental institutions.

One Home for Two Peoples - Isra-Palestine:

The bi-national State in which the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority forces Israel to resume full control of the West Bank and Gaza, and international pressure, including weakening American support, makes Israel comply. Both Israeli and Palestinian societies are torn amongst themselves between those who see the new reality as an opportunity and those who prefer a nation-state either in a secular or in a religious version. Opposition on both sides is vehement. There is a mass emigration of Jews.

A Shared Home - A Jewish Home as Part of A Regional Confederation:

The State of Israel enters the Confederacy together with Palestine (by agreement with the Palestinian Authority) and Jordan. Israel embodies the Jewish national identity and becomes the spiritual-educational centre for Jewish communities all over the world.

In subsequent attempts to widen the scope of internal strategic dialogue and focus more specifically on the Palestinian issue, a predominant view emerged, although, since it was decided not to produce a written report, this remains undocumented. The underlying idea that the nation of Israel has an historic right to all the historic land of Israel (Eretz Israel) including the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) is widespread, although whether it is a majority view is uncertain. In general there was more concern about the nuclear threat from Iran, and (presciently) the danger of regional instability following the death of Mubarak, than about any problems posed in Palestine now that the second intifada had been crushed. From the outset the Israeli state has faced mortal threats from its vastly more numerous Arab and Muslim neighbours. It has been a state under siege fighting for its life. Arabs refused to accept the opportunity to have a sovereign state on nearly 50% of mandate Palestine in 1947 (having refused a still more generous partition offer in 1937). The reason Israel occupied the West Bank in the first place was in response to external attack in 1967. It was the Palestinians who rejected the chance of an

agreement in 2000 and subsequently reverted to terrorist violence. It was Hamas, with its virulently anti-semitic charter and commitment to the destruction of Israel, which seized power in Gaza in 2007 and thereafter indiscriminately attacked Israeli civilians. No government can tolerate this. The threat persists. Why should Israel, as possessor, give up anything at all, in view of its lack of defensive depth? It is a question of the *balance of strategic risk*. However great the long-term dangers of effectively holding on to the whole of mandate Palestine might be, or the promises made in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative by those who remain Israel's enemies, these cannot outweigh the immediate, irreversible and palpable risk of loosening the security grip on the West Bank in order to grasp them. The result of evacuation has been demonstrated in Gaza. A weak Palestinian state will never be able to prevent Israel's enemies from rushing in to fill the vacuum - even more so now that Hamas may be part of a unity government. This is the strategic nexus that freezes the present situation. Israel relies on reinforcing its own deterrent threat - the 'iron wall' - not on external 'guarantees' from countries (including the United States) that do not live in the neighbourhood and would sacrifice Israeli security imperatives for their own regional interests. Current turmoil in the Arab world dictates caution until outcomes are clearer. Dangers have increased. Campaigns of delegitimation have intensified. The greater the isolation and pressure from outside, the more Israelis close ranks and shift to the political right.

This is the core of the prevailing strategic thinking uncovered through the promotion of internal Israeli strategic debate. But that is not to say that this is all of it. Israel is a highly sophisticated and diverse society with vibrant independent media and outspoken critics of government practices and official policies. The whole purpose of the inclusive internal strategic dialogue is to focus this systematically on the question of national strategy in order to improve the standard of national debate - and above all national capacity for effective strategic thinking in the interest of, and as defined by, Israelis. To this end, during the second phase (2009-11) the Israeli Strategic Forum specifically concentrated on developing the methodology for thinking in terms of systemic complexity in order to transcend the limits of short-term 'linear' analysis. The results were highly impressive and demonstrated conclusively that, behind what sometimes appears from the outside to be an inflexible and doctrinaire official decision making process, there is a remarkable capacity for creative and very intelligent strategic analysis. Nevertheless, to carry this into the heart of elite Israeli politics, let alone into the heart of government, is another matter. Despite recent attempts from within Israeli civil society to formulate an Israeli Peace Initiative (IPI) in response to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (6 April 2011) this remains marginal in Israeli public debate. Some former security and military leaders publicly voice the view that the current Israeli strategy - of continuous settlement expansion in Jerusalem and on the West Bank and blocking of moves towards a genuine Palestinian state - is strategically disastrous for Israel because it leads to progressive and accelerating international delegitimation. But for internal demographic and other reasons (for example the make-up of the Knesset and the nature of Israeli coalitions) this does not as yet greatly influence the remarkable right wing ascendancy in Israeli politics. Senior politicians from outside the ruling

coalition - notably those in Kadima who took part in the Olmert/Livni negotiations - are largely silent. The main political manoeuvrings, already with one eye on the next national elections, centre around power struggles between Netanyahu and Lieberman for the nationalist vote. The progress of international 'delegitimation' is far more widely attributed to the external plotting of Israel's enemies, than to international indignation at the Israeli government's refusal to equate its own demand for recognition of the legitimacy of the Jewish state with recognition of the equal right of Palestinians to a Palestinian state. The right wing plan to use present Israeli military superiority to redraw the borders of Israel to ensure a permanent Jewish majority and retain permanent control of key economic and strategic assets - and readiness to ride out the subsequent international storm - is not publicly articulated and remains largely publicly unchallenged. Such long-term strategic debate is missing. As a result the road is blocked for serious internal questioning at the core of Israeli public politics of the long-term sustainability of the present 'one state' situation in which Israel is the only state and intends indefinitely to retain effective control of the whole territory. Since this is the essential prerequisite for there being meaningful bilateral talks about a 'two state' outcome in the first place, the heart of the linguistic intractability that at the moment renders the entire negotiation option otiose is thereby made manifest.

LEVEL 2: THE STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT OF DISCOURSES BETWEEN CONFLICT PARTIES

On the basis of the inclusive internal Palestinian and Israeli strategic debates discussed above, the daunting challenge facing those who wish to revive the Obama dialogical roadmap for peace becomes plain. What is wanted is a strategic engagement of discourses between the conflict parties, because it provides the necessary context that underpins serious bilateral negotiation. It also links dialogue for political accommodation (elite negotiation) to dialogue for mutual understanding (societal transformation) and connects both of these in turn to the political process. This was the main missing ingredient in the communicative sphere, both after apparent negotiation breakthrough as in the 1990s (the period following agreement is often the most dangerous), and after manifest breakdown as in 2000 and beyond (a strategic vacuum in which frustration leads to violence).

But up to now there has been remarkably little strategic interchange. In the last decade there has been no significant formal Israeli response to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative or further Arab/Palestinian development of it. The unofficial 2003 Geneva accords have been dismissed or ignored without substantial strategic exchange. The road map, Annapolis, and Obama initiatives have passed by in a virtual strategic discursive vacuum. This has been highly damaging.

For example, only promotion of a proper strategic engagement of discourses gives insight into the nature of linguistic intractability and shows that the

conflict parties are, not nearer, but much further apart than is otherwise realised. In general in asymmetric intractable political conflicts the clashing discourses are found not to be subjective 'narratives' playing a merely functional role for conflict parties. They do not coexist in a neutral third space. There is no room for this. They are deadly struggles to occupy the whole of discursive space. Emotion (e.g. indignation) is not separate from the facts that arouse it (the outrages perpetrated) and the principles violated (the injustices). Most of the arguments miss each other entirely. This negative result is highly significant, and may be the beginning of wisdom if it induces humility in would-be third party peacemakers - for instance by guarding against the premature announcements by successive US administrations (including the Obama administration) that settlements will be reached 'within a year', leading to subsequent disappointment and disillusionment.

Based on opinion polls it is often said that 'most Israelis and most Palestinians agree on a two state outcome', or that 'everyone knows what a settlement would look like'. The strategic engagement of discourses shows that they do not. Even those Israelis who say that they do favour a Palestinian state usually add 'but not yet'. Beneath this lies the fact that most Israelis and Palestinians mean different things by the concept 'two states', not just in terms of the well-known litany of contentious issues that constitute them (borders, capitals, citizens), but in terms of how the states themselves are defined. Few Israelis mean by the 'State of Palestine' anything remotely like what most Palestinians mean. And few Palestinians mean by the 'State of Israel' - for example in relation to possible future recognition as part of a final settlement - what most Israelis insist must be recognised. The same applies to the concept 'one state'. Palestinians have up until now not begun to define what - among all the different versions - 'one state' means for them even when this is invoked as an alternative. And Israelis have not seriously debated whether the existing 'one state' situation (Israel is the only state and has effective control of the entire territory) is sustainable. Until this is clarified through a strategic engagement of discourses there is a void at the centre of the negotiation process. It is well known that a negotiated settlement in asymmetric political conflicts depends on the undefeated conflict parties concluding that settlement along these lines will be better for them than the alternatives. So the failure to argue out what the alternatives are is a fatal lacuna. It is one that the Obama administration would be well advised to try to fill.

It is often assumed that majorities on either side are 'moderates'. But the strategic engagement of discourses shows that they are not. On the existential issues majorities are 'extremists of ends' - they will not compromise vital national strategic goals. This is not surprising - Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandela were extremists of ends who would accept no compromise in ending British rule in India, terminating racial discrimination in the USA, or destroying apartheid. They did not want to 'understand' the enemies' discourse, but to eliminate it. Far from avoiding conflict, they wanted more conflict until this was achieved. So, if conflict parties are undefeated, the conflict will continue in different - it is hoped non-violent - ways after the settlement. In Northern Ireland Republicans still aim to achieve a united

Ireland, Unionists to prevent it. The settlement has to be 'sold' to the rival constituencies, not as a compromise, but as a policy shift required for strategic success - even though the idea of a settlement as a mere staging post is anathema to Israel. This is a very difficult task. It includes the aim for peacemakers of ensuring that 'extremists of ends', who may be a majority on some central issues, are not driven into the arms of 'extremists of means' (those who advocate and practice violence), who it is hoped thereby remain a minority.

The strategic engagement of discourses also pinpoints key constituencies which may be most affected by any settlement, but who have as yet not been fully included - such as those Israeli settlers likely not to be incorporated into the State of Israel, or those Israeli Palestinians likely to be incorporated into the State of Palestine as part of a 'land swap' (e.g. the Lieberman plan). The latter constituency, in particular, (whose very name is part of the conflict) constitute the only group that could be included both in the Israeli Strategic Forum (although it was not in fact represented) and in the Palestine Strategy Group. This constituency, making up about a fifth of the Israeli population, is a discursive litmus test, up until now virtually ignored strategically. The idea of forming a distinct inclusive internal strategy group for Israeli Palestinians is one that has widespread support, not only among non-Israeli Palestinians, but also among non-Palestinian Israelis.

LEVEL 3: THE PEACEMAKER AS STRATEGIST - WINNING THE DIALOGICAL WAR TO RESCUE THE OBAMA PLAN

Finally, the strategic engagement of discourses also includes the would-be third party peacemakers themselves. It is now evident from the above that third party peacemakers are not neutral, impartial or disinterested. This is not up to them. The peacemaking discourse is a further discourse battling to occupy the whole of discursive space. The aim of the discourse of the peacemaker is to transform the discourses of the conflict parties so that they are not as they were before.

Above all the aim is to change the perceived balance of strategic risk in the eyes of decision makers within the primary conflict parties so that their subsequent cost-benefit analyses coincide with what the peacemaker wants. In this case, if genuine Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are to be possible, decision makers on both sides must conclude that entering negotiations with serious intent along the lines envisaged is likely to further their strategic goals better than failing to do so. Palestinians must be persuaded that in terms of *process* the new negotiations will be on an entirely different footing to previous experience. Israelis must be persuaded that in terms of intended *outcome* there may be scope for a genuine settlement that will be more in Israeli interests than the absence of such a settlement. At the moment these conditions are clearly absent. So the dialogical task for the would-be peacemaker is onerous.

As seen above, the Obama peace plan clashes with elements of both Palestinian and Israeli strategic thinking. In his 19 May 2011 speech President Obama mentioned 1967 borders with mutual land exchanges, verifiable security arrangements for Israel and a non-militarised Palestinian state, and 'full and phased' withdrawal of the IDF from Palestinian territory, as the principled basis for renewed negotiations. He did not explicitly mention Jerusalem as a shared capital, compensation for Palestinian refugees short of more than a symbolic return to pre-1967 lands, the possibility of a US-led intervention force, or a number of other contentious matters, although positions on all these issues have been prepared. As things stand, although Palestinians will have difficulties with much of this agenda, it is most profoundly at odds with prevailing Israeli strategy, which does not want a 'sovereign' Palestinian state on those terms at all.

Since the third party peacemaker is therefore in this sense also a conflict party, those wanting to promote the Obama peace plan must themselves have a discursive strategy as well worked out and determined as those of the primary conflict parties. This requires a bigger investment of resources and a greater commitment of time and energy than has hitherto been accorded. In addition to the daunting task of changing the cost-benefit analyses of Israeli and Palestinian decision makers, further political capital must also be expended on winning dialogical struggles within the United States (the Israel lobby, Christian Zionist circles, Congress etc) and among other regional and international players in order to minimise opposition and to maximise and orchestrate support. With an impending US Presidential election the former is highly risky as Republican opponents seek to gain votes in key swing states by trying to paint the administration as anti-Israel. And at a time of diminishing US power and preoccupations elsewhere the latter is also a tall order.

Furthermore, as in all strategies, a major dialogical requirement is that there should be a Plan B. In this case, what is the Obama peace plan if bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations definitively fail? Once again, this plays two strategic roles. In addition to timely preparation for that eventuality, there is the strategic role that the possibility of alternatives to bilateral negotiation can already play at the present time in making it more likely that the bilateral negotiation route may, after all, succeed. Given the Israeli determination to retain control of any peace initiative that there may be by ensuring that it is conducted mainly through bilateral negotiation, the possibility of a regionalisation of negotiation (as implied in the Arab and Israeli Peace Initiatives), and above all the international appeal to the UN, are anathema to most Israeli strategists. So this could have been used to support the Obama plan by helping to induce more serious Israeli participation in bilateral negotiation for fear of otherwise losing control. And for this reason even now Israel might be persuaded to begin the next phase of negotiations with borders and land swaps as the US President wants, in the hope that when it comes to it this can be strung out so that it never in the end materialises. But in his address to AIPAC on 22 May 2011 President Obama described America's ties to Israel as 'ironclad' and ruled out the possibility of creating a Palestinian state via a United Nations resolution (despite the fact that Israel was created in this way). It is understandable why he said this - illustrated two

days later by the standing ovation from Congress for the Israeli Prime Minister's 24 May speech. But, by doing this so explicitly, the US President is in danger of giving up important strategic leverage in the struggle to promote serious bilateral negotiation at a time when such leverage is hard to come by.

In conclusion, prospects for the possibility of genuine bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at the moment look slim - although the odds could be changed by a major dialogical offensive in support of the Obama plan along the lines sketched out here. Beyond that, as can happen in complex systems at a tipping point and has happened in other peace processes, a sudden *volte-face* from an unexpected major player can always produce a sudden transformation. This is unpredictable. In response to the September Quartet call for the Palestinians and Israelis to submit proposals on borders and security issues by January 26 2012 to serve as opening positions for subsequent negotiations, the Palestinian Authority President has responded by proposing borders based on 1967 lines but with a willingness to swap 1.9 percent of West Bank territory with Israel, and consent to an international peacekeeping force along the border with Israel and in the Jordan valley. He also accepts demilitarisation of the West Bank albeit allowing limited Palestinian weaponry, and offers an undertaking not to forge military alliances with states hostile to Israel. He will also suspend further unilateral initiatives at the UN until 26 January. Israel has said that it would not cooperate with this approach and that the Quartet should rather get the Palestinians to return to direct and confidential bilateral talks with Israel.

What occurs next may be a tale of four elections - in Egypt, in the Palestinian territories, in Israel, and in the US. The outcome of the first phase of the Egyptian parliamentary elections - particularly the unexpectedly strong showing of the Salafist al-Nour party at the time of writing - underlines the uncertainties ahead. It seems unlikely that the Obama administration will be able to make a dramatic step-change before the next US presidential election. Even so, if it aspires to take a major stride thereafter having won a second term, then, for reasons set out in this paper, there already needs to be vigorous preparation of the dialogical ground in advance. In short, like the primary conflict parties themselves, the peacemaker must now become master strategist if it wants to revive a dialogical roadmap for peace, transform the other competing discourses accordingly - and win.

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In addition the Oxford Research Group convened a three-day meeting in November 2008 between leading Arabs, Israelis and internationals to determine ways in which the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative could be moved higher up the agenda - particularly in Israel - in order to encourage strategic interchange in a vital area where it was as yet conspicuously lacking.

The Oxford Research Group is also now in process of helping to set up an inclusive internal strategy group for Israeli Palestinians in order to fill the discursive gap identified above.