

## A PERMANENT AGREEMENT: THE JEWISH DIMENSION

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Analysis of the insights that arose in the discussions of the working group on the subject of "**The Jewish Dimension of the Permanent Agreements**" focused on several fundamental questions. Each question can be characterized by a continuum of conceptions between opposite poles. Resulting policy will vary, of course, depending on the particular conflicting conceptual basis from which it derives. And indeed, the working group discussions were, from the start, not intended to reach consensus, but to clarify the different positions in such a way that could place before decision makers' additional, significant meanings and viewpoints attending the momentous decisions that await them.

Broadest agreement in the discussions came around the question of Jewish people involvement in the decision making process related to permanent agreement issues. Most of those in favor of such involvement did not advocate granting Diaspora Jews an equal vote in decision making, when the time comes, but they did recognize the profound importance of the issue for the Jewish Diaspora -- first and foremost, Jerusalem. Against this background, most participants **recommended greater Diaspora involvement in the Israeli discourse on this issue, and a more systematic institutionalization of the way it presents its arguments to the Israeli government.**

The main questions that arose in the discussion, the various answers they received and the resulting, proposed policy recommendations are as follows:

### Will a peace agreement affect Jewish-Muslim relations?

- A. **The negative answer** – A change in the attitude of the Muslim world towards Israel and the Jewish world is a prerequisite for reaching a true peace agreement. The process has developed in an inverse order, and so, there is little point in trying to first reach a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement. The current reality does not bode well: the moderate countries supporting the Arab peace initiative are trending down while the radical elements are flourishing.

The resulting policy:

- A comprehensive strategy (currently non-existent) must be utilized to strengthen the moderates in the Arab world, who are engaged in a difficult struggle with radical Islam.
- B. **The positive answer** – the continuing conflict poses a great obstacle to creating change in the relationship between Judaism and Islam. Indeed, peace agreements will not bring about an immediate and total change, but they will drive a positive process towards the goal. Absent a solution to the conflict, there is no chance for change. Conditioning advancement in Israeli-Palestinian relations on change within Islam strengthens Iran's hand and will make it impossible to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

The resulting policy:

- Promoting an Israeli-Palestinian political agreement while emphasizing – and properly shaping – those characteristics of the agreement with broader implications for facilitating and accelerating improvement in Jewish-Muslim relations.

### Can Jewish-Muslim dialogue aid political reconciliation?

- A. **The positive answer** – Faith in the process has faltered, and it actually lacks any real legitimacy, a new approach is needed. The world of religion can best supply this legitimacy as religion plays a larger role than in the past, and the countries in the Middle East are becoming increasingly religious. If there were Islamic legitimacy for the process, reality would change radically. There is an internal debate in Muslim society of which we are unaware and uninvolved.

The resulting policy:

- Dialogue with Muslim religious elements must be deepened.
- Although, at present, Hamas leadership rejects negotiations based on recognition of Israel, a move must be made to talk with religious elements and thinkers close to Hamas, in a manner that could bring about an internal split in the organization.
- Efforts to unify Hamas and Fatah must not be treated negatively.

**B. The negative answer** –It has become clear that religious elements are taking a radical position that does not support reconciliation.

The resulting policy:

- Not to speak with Hamas. Its integration in the political process will harm the Palestinians prepared for peace with Israel. Only after an agreement is reached can it be possible to examine inclusion of Hamas.
- Talks should include the Tanzim leadership (as an alternative to the radical Muslim elements). It is preferable to draw legitimacy for the process from Tanzim rather than from Hamas.

### **Should Palestinian recognition of the right of the Jewish people to its state be insisted upon in negotiations?**

**A. The positive answer** – The geopolitical arena relevant to Israel will continue to be unstable and loaded with conflicts. Efforts to change Israel's character from inside (Israeli Arabs) and from outside (delegitimization) are expected to continue. In these conditions, it is increasingly important to receive formal recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people.

The resulting policy:

- Inclusion of a clause in the future agreement expressing Palestinian recognition of the Jewish people's right to its homeland must be insisted upon.
- When considering which is preferable, a bilateral agreement (Israeli-Palestinian) or an Israeli-Arab "comprehensive agreement," the reasoning according to which overall Arab recognition of Israel as a Jewish state is preferable to Palestinian recognition alone must be factored into the arguments supporting a comprehensive agreement. Insisting on Arab League support for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, when one is reached, may constitute another alternative in this matter.

**B. The negative answer** - Demanding Palestinian recognition that Israel is a Jewish state is unnecessary and disrespectful, and even if they did grant such recognition, they could always renounce it later.

The resulting policy:

- No significant assets should be wasted in negotiations pursuing Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, and the issue must not be turned at this stage into an ultimatum for an agreement.

### Can concessions be made regarding Jerusalem for the purpose of reaching an agreement?

- A. **The negative answer** – Jerusalem is the heart of the Jewish nation, it is not a bargaining chip, and must remain undivided and under Israeli sovereignty.

The resulting policy:

- A solution regarding Jerusalem must be left to the distant future. Unequal treatment of Jerusalem's Arab citizens must be curtailed. The creation of municipal quarters that will operate autonomously, to the greatest extent possible, must be considered.

- B. **The positive answer** – Attitudes about an agreement with the Palestinians cannot be mortgaged to emotional and religious feelings. It must be derived from the long-term national security needs of Israel. Without compromise -- division or partnership -- in Jerusalem, and without ensuring the status of Islam in the holy places, there is no chance for peace. In this context, it is not recommended to ignore the connection of Christianity to the Holy Places and the potential in involving the Christian world as a balancing component in future agreements on Jerusalem. Even if the Jewish people has the right to Jerusalem we do not have to exercise it in full if it contradicts the national interest.

The resulting policy:

- An agreement on Jerusalem must not be postponed as there is no guarantee that the situation will improve in the future, it is more likely that it will deteriorate. In Jerusalem we are close to a Balkanization that will prevent division.
- The parts of Jerusalem that may be conceded and those that "are worth dying for" must be defined.
- There is a need to consider structures of agreement over the Holy Basin that may establish a positive historical shift in the relationship of Judaism and Islam and Judaism and Christianity.
- Jewish settlement in Arab neighborhoods, which may ignite a violent religious conflict, must be avoided. Demanding a right of return of Jews to Sheikh Jarrakh will drive the Palestinian side to insist on a similar demand for Israeli towns.

### Is the Jewish Diaspora entitled to be involved in the decisions concerning the permanent peace agreement?

- A. **The positive answer** – It is impossible to ignore the emotional and religious bond world Jewry has to Jerusalem and its stake in other issues concerning the peace process. If Israel is the land of the Jewish people then, by definition, Jews everywhere have rights in Israel beginning with questions of conversion and ending with arrangements at the Western Wall. The future of

Jerusalem and the Temple Mount is a Jewish issue, not just an Israeli one. The Diaspora has the right to voice an opinion in this sensitive issue but the decision must be reserved for Israel. Among some Diaspora Jews, there is a feeling that their opinions are not being heard in Israel. Such an atmosphere may lead to protest and/or feelings of alienation towards Israel. These feelings may become more acute when the issues concerning the permanent agreement appear on the agenda.

The resulting policy:

- The government of Israel needs to efficiently and institutionally integrate the wider Jewish component in the decision making process.
- The Jewish Agency must add mechanisms for consultation and discourse between the Diaspora and the Israeli government, in addition to the function fulfilled by the coordination committee.
- New channels of communication must be established that will enable Diaspora Jewry to more efficiently take part in the Israeli discourse around the peace agreement and the permanent issues.
- Negotiations must include the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries in Israel and the Diaspora.

To read the background paper prepared in advance of the working group discussions click [Here](#)