



THE SABAN CENTER  
*for* MIDDLE EAST POLICY  
*at* BROOKINGS

ANALYSIS PAPER

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Number 25, February 2012

# THE MIDDLE EAST QUARTET:

## A POST-MORTEM

KHALED ELGINDY



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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It has been ten years since the four most powerful players in the Middle East peace process—the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations—came together under the diplomatic umbrella known as the Quartet. Formed in response to outbreak of the Second Intifada in late 2000 and the collapse of peace negotiations a few months later, the Quartet appeared ideally suited for dealing with the seemingly intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Its small but powerful membership allowed it to act swiftly and decisively, while its informal structure gave it the flexibility needed to navigate crises and adapt to changing developments on the ground.

Yet, despite the high expectations that accompanied its formation, and some modest success early on, the Quartet has little to show for its decade-long involvement in the peace process. Israelis and Palestinians are no closer to resolving the conflict, and in the few instances in which political negotiations did take place, the Quartet's role was usually relegated to that of a political bystander. Meanwhile, the Quartet has failed to keep pace with the dramatic changes that have occurred in the conflict and the region in recent years, particularly since the advent of the Arab Awakening. Having spent most of the last three years in a state of near paralysis, and having failed to dissuade the Palestinians from seeking UN membership and recognition in September 2011, the Quartet has finally reached the limits of its utility.

### THE QUARTET'S TRACK RECORD

Of all its interventions, none are more illustrative of the Quartet's performance and modus operandi than the Roadmap and the Quartet Principles, the two most important and consequential actions taken by the group to date. The publication of the Roadmap in April 2003 sought to correct three fundamental shortcomings in the Oslo peace process of the 1990s. In addition to calling for parallel (rather than sequential or conditional) implementation of each side's obligations and insisting on monitoring and accountability for both sides, the Roadmap sought to articulate a more clearly defined end game. Whatever theoretical or potential benefits the Roadmap might have offered, however, were negated by the fact that it was for all intents and purposes a dead letter.

The Israeli government, already highly suspicious of the Quartet, rejected the entire Roadmap exercise precisely because of its emphasis on parallelism and monitoring. As a result, despite ostensibly agreeing with the Quartet consensus regarding both of these principles, the George W. Bush administration worked systematically to block or hinder them. Having enthusiastically backed the Sharon government's "security first" doctrine, key elements within the Bush administration agreed to make Israel's implementation of the Roadmap conditional on the Palestinians meeting their obligations first. Similarly, despite the strenuous efforts by various actors to set up an official monitoring structure, no Quartet monitoring mechanism was ever established.

Instead, in keeping with Israel's objections to international or independent monitoring, only the United States was allowed to monitor implementation and compliance. And even then, such missions were given low priority and were sporadic and highly constrained in their operation—for example by not publicizing their findings or even sharing them with the other three Quartet members.

The Roadmap was eventually discarded altogether by the Bush administration's—and later the Quartet's—support for Israel's Gaza Disengagement Plan, a primary objective of which was to neutralize the Quartet plan. The fact that it was the United States rather than the Quartet that ultimately subverted the Roadmap meant little in light of EU, UN, and Russian acquiescence at each stage of the process. The subversion of the Roadmap later proved to be the Quartet's "original sin," with far-reaching consequences that are still felt today. The consensus that had been so painstakingly forged around the Roadmap was exposed as a farce. Any benefits the plan may have offered were nullified by the divergent goals of the United States and the other three Quartet members, along with their desire to maintain the unity of the group at all costs.

Within months of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the Quartet faced an even greater challenge after the surprise election victory of the Palestinian Islamist faction Hamas gave it control over the Palestinian Authority (PA) in January 2006. In response, the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia called for three criteria to be met—nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements—for the new Hamas-led government to receive recognition and support. While on the surface the Quartet Principles reflected a consensus among all four of the group's members, major divisions surfaced almost from the start and have persisted ever since.

Despite attempts by Alvaro de Soto, the UN envoy at the time, to argue that the principles were

never intended as conditions on international donor assistance to the PA, the Bush White House made sure they would be implemented as precisely that. The U.S. and EU decisions in 2006 to withhold international aid, which virtually all donors including Arab states complied with, amounted to an international sanctions regime. This, combined with Israel's nearly simultaneous decision to withhold valued added tax (VAT) revenues collected on Palestinian imports that accounted for some 60 to 70 percent of all PA revenue, triggered a severe economic and humanitarian crisis throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Once again, despite the apparent consensus among the four powers, it soon became clear that the Quartet members each had a very different understanding of what the new policy meant, or how to put it into effect. These differences spanned the entire spectrum, from the U.S. insistence on a "no aid/no contact" policy to the Russian call for engaging Hamas in a dialogue in the hope of moderating its positions, with the EU position leaning more toward the American one and the UN position more toward the Russian one. Despite the apparent similarity in the U.S. and EU positions, in practice the goals of the United States and the European Union diverged sharply: whereas the Europeans have sought compromises by which to continue channeling aid into Palestinian hands, the United States has been far less flexible. The intense disagreement over the Quartet Principles, which almost caused the group to break up, only added to the sense of confusion regarding its mission and further undercut its standing. Ironically, Hamas's takeover of Gaza in July 2007 may well have saved the Quartet by removing the single most potent source of internal conflict it had ever had to face.

Two other experiences offer additional insights into the Quartet's handling of crisis situations and its overall approach to conflict management: the May 2010 flotilla tragedy and the role of the Quartet representative. For many of its proponents, the

Quartet's true value was demonstrated in the wake of the deadly May 2010 Israeli raid on an international aid flotilla attempting to reach Gaza, which subsequently led to an easing of Israel's blockade of Gaza. A UN-led initiative propelled by American power and influence and put into effect by the official Quartet representative was seen as a clear case of "the Quartet at its best." This perspective, however, ignores the central role of the Quartet in creating the conditions that led to the blockade and that gave rise to the flotilla in the first place, namely the adoption of the Quartet Principles followed by years of Quartet inaction in the face of worsening conditions in Gaza. The flotilla crisis also highlighted another of the Quartet's major failings: its inability to shape events rather than merely respond to them.

Then there is the anomaly known as the office of the Quartet representative, currently held by former British prime minister Tony Blair. The post was first held by former World Bank president James Wolfensohn, who was appointed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in April 2005 to oversee the Gaza disengagement process. Although both Wolfensohn and Blair were given relatively narrow mandates focused on assisting Palestinians in areas of economics and institution-building, the two missions could not have been more different. Whereas Wolfensohn sought to play a very political role throughout his tenure, Blair has been content mostly to remain inside his "tight box." Despite the differences between the two envoys, the two missions have one important thing in common: both were initially conceived not as integral components of the Quartet's mission but as alternatives to it. Overall, the role of Quartet representative, particularly under Tony Blair, has helped to reinforce American dominance of the process while making the Quartet more palatable to Israel by channeling EU, UN, and Russian involvement away from the diplomatic process and by depoliticizing the role of the Quartet generally.

## WHY THE QUARTET DOES NOT WORK

The Quartet's failings stem mainly from three factors: its loose, informal structure; the imbalance of power and interests in its composition; and a lack of genuine consensus among its members. The group's highly malleable structure and lopsided membership has hobbled its ability to function as an independent actor. While these structural constraints have not been the primary source of its ineffectiveness, they have provided an enabling environment for a far more damaging and entirely self-inflicted defect: the willingness of its members to paper over genuine and often far-reaching disagreements in the interest of maintaining group cohesion. The fact that the Quartet could be all things to all people allowed its most powerful and vested member, the United States, not only to dominate the institution itself but to effectively transform it into something other than what it was originally intended to be.

### ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

As with other contact groups, the informal and ad hoc nature of the Quartet was intended to bypass some of the structural constraints imposed by formal international mechanisms like the UN Security Council. The absence of an organic, institutional structure was also seen as essential to the Quartet's proper functioning, maximizing the collective impact of its members while maintaining their individual freedom of action. The Quartet's loose, informal structure has been a double-edged sword, however. While it is true that there have been no formal constraints on individual Quartet members, their freedom of action can be, and often has been, impeded by their involvement in the group. This is partly due to the fact that Quartet positions necessarily reflect the lowest common denominator, usually represented by the United States, and to the group's diminished credibility as a result of the other three members' acquiescence to U.S. demands.

## IMBALANCED MEMBERSHIP

The Quartet's composition is rather unique among contact groups. Its membership includes two permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States and Russia) and two supranational organizations (the United Nations and the European Union), but no regional actors or other direct stakeholders in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, two of its members, the United States and the European Union, are also the largest donors to the peace process. This unusually top-heavy arrangement was a direct response to the conditions under which the group emerged, namely the intense violence of the Second Intifada and the need to assemble the most powerful actors in the most efficient configuration in the shortest amount of time. The Quartet was also a way for the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia to lobby the United States to reengage in the process and to try to influence U.S. positions once it did.

Despite the apparent complementariness of the group's membership—former UN envoy Terje Rød-Larsen famously described it as the perfect marriage of American power, European money, and UN legitimacy—the Quartet suffers from a fundamental imbalance that directly affects how it operates, irrespective of its stated or normative positions. The asymmetry has been most evident in the unmitigated dominance of the Quartet by the United States, which is both its most powerful member and the one with the highest concentration of interests in the conflict. The absence of any regional powers that might offset this imbalance has only compounded this imbalance. Thus, while the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia were, on the surface, bound by a common desire to end the conflict, they each had their own motivations for joining the effort that were not necessarily tied to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For the United States, the Quartet has served several distinct but overlapping purposes. In addition to

channeling the interventions of the major international powers, the Quartet was also used to advance other regional objectives like the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The fact that the United States had both the ability and the will to act unilaterally has also made the Quartet's role, to a great extent, a function of broader U.S. policy priorities in the region, including its bilateral relationship with Israel. While the United States typically has worked closely with Israel, it has been less bound by the need to coordinate with its Quartet partners. This was particularly true under the Bush administration but has persisted under the Obama administration as well, as demonstrated by the latter's decision to exclude the other Quartet members from the launching of direct negotiations in September 2010.

American dominance of the Quartet would not be possible, however, without the parallel tendency of the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia to acquiesce to the United States, even when serious disagreements existed and when the stakes were high. This, combined with the unwillingness of the United Nations, Russia, and especially the European Union to use their substantial leverage as a counterbalance to U.S. unilateralism, earned the group the unflattering nickname of the "Quartet *sans trois*." Even if they could not compete with American power and influence, there was little to lose and much to gain from being part of even an ineffective group, particularly for the European Union.

As the largest single donor to the Palestinian Authority and Israel's second largest trading partner, the European Union had long sought to translate its substantial economic clout into a meaningful political role, if not on par with that of the United States than at least significantly greater than it had played in the past. The United Nations, which had not played a serious political role in the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1968 and whose involvement in the region was largely confined to peacekeeping and other operational matters, also hoped for an



entrée into the diplomatic process. Finally, Russia's involvement stemmed from a desire to enhance its regional stature as well as its leverage with its traditional European and American rivals on a range of regional and international issues. Ironically, it was this wish to be "relevant" that has helped consolidate American dominance of the Quartet.

Though there were obvious advantages in having other international powers like the European Union and the United Nations sign on to its positions, the United States could afford to act on its own when that backing was not there. The three weaker members, by contrast, have rarely been in a position to shape the peace process independently of the United States, not just because they lack its power and influence, but because doing so risks freezing them out of the process. Instead of leveling the diplomatic playing field as expected, the Quartet has actually reinforced American dominance by giving greater weight and legitimacy to U.S. positions, while simultaneously downgrading the value of individual EU, UN, and Russian positions in comparison to those of the Quartet. A similar dynamic exists between the parties to the conflict. Whereas Israel has the ability to shape developments on the ground unilaterally, such as through settlement expansion or military action, the Palestinians by and large do not. Thus, the two actors that seem to have derived the most benefit from the Quartet—the United States and Israel—are also the ones that are the least bound by it.

#### CONSENSUS FOR ITS OWN SAKE

The Quartet's greatest strength—and the one most frequently cited by its proponents—is its ability to speak to the parties with a single, authoritative voice. In addition to minimizing the possibility of competing interventions, it also reduces the ability of the parties to play one actor against another. This assumes, of course, that its members are genuinely of one mind with regard to the goals of the group, which was usually *not* the case with the

Quartet. Beyond the superficial "vision" articulated in the Roadmap, there is very little common understanding among Quartet members regarding its objectives, means of operation, or overall role in the peace process. Indeed, the group has been deeply divided on nearly every crucial issue it has taken up since its creation. As a result, what should have been the Quartet's greatest asset in reality has been a serious liability.

Although deep divisions were present from the very start, nowhere was the lack of alignment among Quartet members more evident—or more damaging—than in the cases of the Roadmap and the Quartet Principles, and in the disparate treatment of the two. Even as the Quartet allowed implementation of Roadmap to fall by the wayside, it has held scrupulously to the letter of the Quartet Principles. Although only the former was officially enshrined in a Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1515), it was the latter that assumed quasi-legal status.

In both cases, a consensus was negotiated among all four actors and established as official Quartet policy. And yet, in both cases, differences in how Quartet members understood that consensus were substantial enough that they nearly caused the group to break up. In the case of the Roadmap, disagreements over implementation were papered over and eventually overtaken by a new "consensus" around the need to get behind the Gaza disengagement. When it came to the far more formidable divisions over the Quartet Principles, however, the lack of genuine consensus was simply subordinated to the desire to maintain unity at all costs. Indeed, since the split between Hamas and Fatah and the siege of Gaza in the summer of 2007, both outgrowths in no small measure of the Quartet Principles, the Quartet has become increasingly inactive, if not irrelevant.

What Quartet officials often failed to realize, however, is that such hollow—and in some cases *illusory*—consensuses were often more harmful than

not reaching a consensus at all. Likewise, contrary to the Quartet's credo, collective action can be less effective, and in some cases more damaging than individual members acting on their own. Instead, the goal became a "consensus" for its own sake. The Palestinian UN membership bid of September 2011 finally exposed the myth that a Quartet "consensus" was synonymous with strength, as well as the fallacy that the Quartet enhances rather than dilutes EU and UN influence in the peace process. Despite months of deep divisions across the Atlantic and within the European Union, the lack of consensus did not produce the apocalyptic outcomes that Quartet enthusiasts in the EU and elsewhere had feared. On the contrary, there may be strength in disunity that could lead to a more honest debate and create new opportunities for moving the process forward.

If the Quartet's greatest strength was its ability to marshal the collective resources of its members and speak with one authoritative voice, its principal weaknesses was its tendency to be all things to all people. The malleability of the Quartet allowed its most powerful member, the United States, to dominate the mechanism so completely as to effectively transform it in virtually every way. Once conceived as a multilateral framework for resolving the conflict, the group was now little more than a tool of American foreign policy.

The Quartet's original mission as a vehicle for mediating between two parties has been replaced by one focused mainly on managing the affairs of one of them—the Palestinians. In the process, it also shifted from a more comprehensive and integrated vision aimed at conflict resolution to one that more more reactive and disjointed even in its attempts at conflict management.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

In the end, the Quartet's greatest sin was not that it failed to achieve what it had set out to accomplish but that it insisted on maintaining the pretense that it *would* or even could. In the process of becoming all things to all people, the Quartet has ceased to be anything at all.

The current mechanism is too outdated, dysfunctional, and discredited to be reformed. Instead of undertaking another vain attempt to "reactivate" the Quartet, the United States, the European Union, United Nations, and Russia should simply allow the existing mechanism to go quietly into the night. In the short term, this means the office of the Quartet representative will need to be folded into the existing donor/aid structure. In the medium to long term, however, it will require the United States and its international partners, both inside and outside the region, to work together to forge a new international consensus around the requirements for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace between Palestinians and Israelis, as well as devise a new peace process "architecture" that is more coherent, strategic, and balanced than the current arrangement. One possible way forward would be to convene an international peace conference (modeled on the 1991 Madrid Conference), perhaps during the first half of 2012, bringing together its former Quartet partners, key regional allies (particularly Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and possibly others like Qatar and Morocco), along with other relevant stakeholders (i.e., Norway, Turkey, World Bank, etc.).

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# INTRODUCTION

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October 2011 marked ten years since the creation of the Middle East Quartet, comprised of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia. The Quartet was formed following the collapse of the Oslo peace process and the resurgence of Israeli-Palestinian violence during the second Palestinian uprising known as the al-Aqsa Intifada. Its formation was hailed as a diplomatic coup bringing together for the first time the four most powerful players in the Middle East peace process under one diplomatic roof. It was, as a former UN official once described it, an “ingenious diplomatic experiment.”<sup>1</sup> Yet few would characterize it as such today. Despite the high expectations and ambitious sense of purpose that accompanied its formation, the Quartet has little to show for its decade-long involvement in the peace process.

Not only has it failed to generate any meaningful progress toward the goal of resolving the conflict, in the few instances in which talks did take place, the Quartet was usually relegated to the role of political bystander. Its record in managing crises and preventing violence has fared no better—from its inability to secure a ceasefire during the Intifada to its perplexing silence during the 2008–09 Gaza War. The

Quartet’s most noteworthy achievement, the internationally backed peace plan known as the Roadmap, was abandoned almost as soon as it was published in April 2003, wrecking the group’s credibility at an early stage. The Quartet’s only other significant intervention consisted of the Quartet Principles, a set of conditions imposed on the Palestinian Authority (PA) following Hamas’s election victory in January 2006, paving the way for the ongoing blockade of Gaza and the political split within the PA.

While it would be naïve to expect an informal group like the Quartet to singlehandedly engineer an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in reality it never even came close to accomplishing any of its stated objectives. Despite the widely held perception that the group’s interventions have been largely positive or at worst benign, the Quartet bears substantial responsibility for the current state of affairs, including the steady erosion of the Palestinian leadership’s domestic credibility and the inability to resume credible negotiations. Meanwhile, neither the Quartet nor the peace process it is supposed to serve has kept pace with the dramatic changes to both the conflict and the region in recent years—particularly the extraordinary developments associated with the Arab Awakening in 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” May 2007, p. 23, available at <<http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2007/06/12/DeSotoReport.pdf>>.

Coincidentally, October 2011 also marked another major milestone in Middle East peacemaking, the twentieth anniversary of face-to-face negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference. As the Quartet concludes its first decade and the peace process its second, both may now be facing their most

critical challenges yet. After years of virtual paralysis, the group's failure to dissuade the Palestinians from seeking UN membership and recognition in September 2011 or to restart negotiations since then may be the clearest sign that the Quartet has finally outlived its utility.

## BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

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What exactly is the Quartet, and what is its role in the peace process? In simple terms, the Quartet is an informal mechanism that brings together the four most important international actors in the Middle East peace process—the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia—with the aim of brokering an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Precisely what this means, however, depends on whom one asks, and when. Established a decade ago, the Quartet is only the latest manifestation of the international community’s involvement in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, a phenomenon nearly as old as the conflict itself. Its formation therefore reflects not only the peculiar political, strategic, security, and humanitarian conditions that existed at the time but the many different experiences and initiatives that preceded it.

International involvement in the conflict between Arabs and Jews in the Holy Land goes back nearly ninety years to the creation of the Palestine Mandate by the League of Nations in 1922, which eventually led to the United Nations’ partition of

Palestine in 1947. In terms of the contemporary Arab-Israeli conflict, the first serious attempt at international mediation began after the 1967 War and the formation of the ill-fated Jarring Mission.<sup>2</sup> It was only after the 1973 War that the American-led and internationally sponsored peace process of today began to take shape. The passage of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 338, which called for a ceasefire to the war, paved the way for a host of international interventions, most notably the convening of the first international peace conference for the Middle East in Geneva in December 1973.<sup>3</sup>

A decade and a half later, U.S. secretary of state George Shultz resurrected the idea of an international conference attended by all “parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict” along with the five permanent members of the Security Council. Although Shultz’s plan never materialized, it laid the groundwork for the historic Madrid Conference of 1991, during which bilateral and multilateral negotiations were launched simultaneously between Israel and her Arab neighbors. Shortly after the Oslo

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to calling for a withdrawal of Israeli forces from Arabs lands captured in the war, United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (November 22, 1967) provided for the appointment of a “Special Representative” to serve as mediator and facilitate implementation of the resolution’s goal of a “just and lasting peace.” The post was held by Dr. Gunnar Jarring, Sweden’s ambassador to the Soviet Union, who served until November 1968. The Jarring Mission ultimately failed and marked an end to the UN’s peacemaking role in the Middle East, a role thereafter assumed by the United States.

<sup>3</sup> In parallel with the initiatives undertaken at the diplomatic level and the convening of the Geneva Peace Conference (UNSCR 344), UNSCR 338 also led to a proliferation of international interventions on the ground, including the dispatching of UN observers to supervise the 1973 ceasefire (UNSCR 339), later expanded into the United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF I and II) (UNSCR 340, 341).

Accords of 1993, the Steering Committee of the Madrid Conference's multilateral track established the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), a twelve-member donor-coordination mechanism to oversee development assistance to the Palestinians. All of these interventions have helped shape the Quartet in both form and function, as well as how the two parties relate to it.

## ORIGINS AND FORMATION

On March 29, 2002, following an upsurge in Palestinian suicide attacks against Israelis, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched a major military offensive against the Palestinians in the West Bank. The offensive, the largest military operation in the West Bank since the 1967 War, resulted in the IDF's reoccupation of most Palestinian cities, substantial numbers of civilian casualties, wide-scale destruction of the Palestinian Authority's security and governing institutions, and a siege of Palestinian president Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah. It was in this context that, on April 10, 2002, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell and his EU, UN, and Russian counterparts convened in Madrid to address the deteriorating situation and formally announce the creation of the Quartet. While the Israeli offensive served as the immediate catalyst for its formation, the foundations of the Quartet were laid some eighteen months earlier, during the crisis sparked by the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in late 2000 and the collapse of peace negotiations in early 2001.

In early 2001, as the Intifada raged throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the political landscape of the region was undergoing equally dramatic changes as a result of the convergence of three major developments. On January 20, George W. Bush was sworn in as president of the United States. Unlike his predecessor, who had devoted considerable time and re-

sources to Arab-Israeli peacemaking, President Bush viewed it largely as a lost cause. This was followed one week later by the collapse of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in Taba, and with it the Oslo peace process. The election on February 6 of hard-line Likud leader Ariel Sharon as prime minister of Israel only affirmed Bush's aversion to the peace process. Sharon insisted there would be no negotiations without a full cessation of violence. Consequently, the new U.S. administration declared that any future negotiations should be left to the parties themselves and that the United States would vastly diminish its involvement in the peace process.<sup>4</sup>

All previous attempts to end the violence had failed. The Palestinians, who had actively campaigned for intervention since the outbreak of the Intifada, wanted a full-blown "international protection force" to shield Palestinian civilians from attack but were willing to settle for a UN "commission of inquiry" to investigate the causes behind the violence. However, the United States and Israel remained adamantly opposed to a protection force and were wary of any inquiry under UN auspices. As a compromise, President Bill Clinton sent a five-member international "fact-finding" mission, headed by former Senate majority leader George Mitchell, to look into the causes of the violence.

Despite a U.S. veto in March 2001 of a draft Security Council resolution calling for a UN "observer force," the issue of international monitoring became the subject of intense debate and diplomatic activity, as Palestinians continued to push the issue any way they could. By the time the Mitchell Committee released its official findings in May 2001, the Palestinians had put forth their own proposal for an international mechanism charged with monitoring implementation of Mitchell's recommendations. The proposed mechanism was to be

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<sup>4</sup> Even after the parties launched a last-ditch effort to clinch a deal in Taba on January 21, Bush's first full day in office, administration officials were instructed to stay away from the proceedings. As a result, a single junior State Department official was dispatched to Taba for the purpose of reporting back to Washington.



comprised of representatives of both sides along with members from the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, Russia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Norway (the latter two having participated in the Mitchell Committee).<sup>5</sup> The plan built on an earlier Jordanian-Egyptian initiative calling for a ceasefire and various confidence building measures to be monitored jointly by Egypt, Jordan, the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia.<sup>6</sup>

The escalating violence on the ground triggered a flurry of diplomatic initiatives. In the words of one former senior U.S. official, “Every week a different foreign minister was presenting a new ‘plan’ to the Israelis and Palestinians. It was total confusion.”<sup>7</sup> As various international envoys pushed the parties to end the fighting, a parallel campaign was being waged to convince the United States to end its self-imposed disengagement. These efforts were led primarily by UN special coordinator for the Middle East Terje Rød-Larsen and EU special representative Miguel Moratinos. The two had taken to holding informal meetings and consultations on a regular basis, eventually bringing in the Russian ambassador in Tel Aviv, to discuss ways of responding to the crisis. However, all three understood that their efforts would not succeed without the active involvement of the United States. With the exception of Secretary of State Powell and a few of his closest advisers in the State Department, however, efforts to convince the Bush administration to reengage in the process largely fell on deaf ears.

By mid-2001, conditions on the ground became increasingly dire. A particularly devastating Hamas

suicide attack on a Tel Aviv nightclub on June 1 served as a tipping point for the United States and the broader international community. In response to the attack, the UN’s Rød-Larsen and Germany’s foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, met personally with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat to draft a statement condemning the bombing and calling for an immediate ceasefire—effectively drafting it themselves. The intervention by Rød-Larsen and Fischer helped convince U.S. officials of the importance of coordinated international action, particularly when it came to pressuring the Palestinians. Within days of the Tel Aviv terror attack, finding it increasingly difficult to stay disengaged, the Bush administration dispatched CIA director George Tenet to the region to arrange a ceasefire.

Tenet managed to secure agreement by both sides within just a few weeks, but the ceasefire never took hold on the ground. Nevertheless, the Tenet Work Plan—a mutual ceasefire plan designed to lay the groundwork for a resumption of negotiations—provided Palestinians with an opportunity. The PA still had serious misgivings about the plan, particularly its delinking of security progress from the political process in line with Sharon’s “security first” approach. Even so, Tenet’s call for a third-party monitoring mechanism, while limited to a dozen or so U.S. technical experts provided Palestinians with a new vehicle by which to push for wider international involvement. The Palestinians argued for the broadening of the mechanism’s composition as well as the creation of an overarching international contact group that would oversee its operation and serve as the political address for broader peace process involvement.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jarat Chopra, “Third Party Monitoring in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *The International Spectator*, April 2003.

<sup>6</sup> The substance of the Jordanian-Egyptian plan is similar to what would later form the basis of the Roadmap, indicating the extent to which there was broad international consensus on these matters throughout this time period. The full text of the plan is available on the MideastWeb website at <<http://www.mideastweb.org/jordanegypt.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup> Kris Bauman, “The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, August 2009), p. 130, unpublished.

<sup>8</sup> Jarat Chopra, “Third Party Monitoring in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.”

By the fall of 2001, violence had intensified dramatically. Israel seized on the United States' response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks—the newly launched “war on terror”—to quash the Intifada and “dismantle terrorist organizations” while shunning official contact with Arafat and the PA.<sup>9</sup> A month later, following the assassination of Israeli tourism minister Rechavam Ze'evi by Palestinian gunmen from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in retaliation for Israel's assassination six weeks earlier of PFLP leader Mustafa Zibri (aka Abu Ali Mustafa), Israel severed all ties with the PA. The breakdown in security once again compelled the Bush administration to engage, and Powell stepped up consultations with his European, Russian, and other counterparts in an effort to generate more pressure on Arafat, restart ceasefire talks, or both. These efforts culminated on October 25, 2001, when U.S., EU, UN, and Russian representatives met jointly with Arafat in Ramallah to push for more stringent security measures, marking the first unofficial act of the Quartet.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of the Quartet, therefore, was a direct response to two concurrent developments: (1) the rapidly deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions that existed in the context of the Intifada and ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence, and (2) the political vacuum created by the Bush administration's decision to disengage from the Middle East peace process. The new mechanism also addressed some of the parties' key demands, at least nominally. The inclusion of actors like the European Union and the United Nations alongside the United States could be seen as satisfying the Palestinians' longstanding desire to internationalize the conflict. On the other hand, the fact that the group operated on the basis of consensus helped reassure the Israeli side, ever mistrustful of EU and UN intentions,

that Quartet decisions would be subject to American approval.

## AIMS OF THE QUARTET

At the time of its formation, the Quartet had two interconnected objectives: to end or prevent Israeli-Palestinian violence and improve conditions on the ground, and then to lay out a plan for returning the parties to a political process aimed at ending the conflict. These are embodied in the its signature peace plan, the Roadmap, the ultimate goal of which is a “final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.” As part of this mission, the Quartet has embraced a multi-tiered approach to resolving the conflict by promoting parallel progress on political, security, economic, and humanitarian issues, as well as institution-building dimensions. Theoretically, therefore, the Quartet's mission is essentially three-fold: (1) to promote peace negotiations (political); (2) to work toward improving conditions on the ground (security, economic, humanitarian, and institution-building); and (3) to monitor implementation of the Roadmap, which encompasses the first two.

The group also served another, more informal but no less central, purpose that dated back to its origins. Alongside its crisis management and conflict resolution roles, the group acted as a forum through which the other major international actors in the conflict could lobby the United States. The Quartet, it will be recalled, began as a troika. EU, UN, and Russian lobbying efforts were initially aimed at convincing the United States to reengage in the peace process but later centered around trying to bring U.S. positions in line with their own. (Ironically, the mechanism also allowed the United States to avoid serious engagement in the peace process by deflecting it back onto the Quartet.)

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<sup>9</sup> “U.S.-Israel Strain Seen Easing as Pullout Nears,” *The Jewish Week*, October 26, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> The four representatives were EU special representative Miguel Moratinos, US consul-general Ron Schlicher, Russian special envoy Andrey Vdovin, and UN special coordinator Terje Rød-Larsen. See “Statement Read by Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen,” United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), October 25, 2001, available at: <<http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adb322aff38525617b006d88d77fc33d890b2b968a785256af100662c08?OpenDocument>>.

## AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY

Though it has no official mandate from the UN, the Quartet's legitimacy, like that of other informal groups is "grounded on explicit approval, authorization, and recognition by various Security Council resolutions."<sup>11</sup> In the case of the Quartet, UN approval was almost immediate. Shortly after U.S., EU, UN, and Russian envoys issued their first joint declaration in October 2001, the statement was endorsed by the Security Council president.<sup>12</sup> The Security Council gave its official recognition in March 2002, in the form of UNSCR 1397, which affirmed the vision of "two States, Israel and Palestine, [that] live side by side within secure and recognized borders." While not referring to the Quartet explicitly, the resolution welcomed the "diplomatic efforts of special envoys from the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations Special Coordinator...."<sup>13</sup>

Following the Quartet's formal announcement in Madrid in April 2002, the president of the Security Council conveyed official support for the joint statement.<sup>14</sup> Several months later, in September 2002, the Security Council made its first formal endorsement of the Quartet with the passage of UNSCR 1435, which expressed "full support for the efforts

of the Quartet" and called "upon the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and all States in the region to cooperate with these efforts...."<sup>15</sup> By far the most significant UN affirmation of the group was the Security Council's formal endorsement of the Quartet Roadmap in November 2003, more than six months after its release, in UNSCR 1515, which reaffirmed the "vision of two States" and emphasized the "need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace...."<sup>16</sup>

## STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION

The emergence of the Quartet is part of a broader proliferation of informal, multi-party coalitions in conflict settings around the world since the end of the Cold War. Like other contact groups, it is a "self-selected ad hoc coalition[ ] of able and willing countries, working separately from the [UN Security] Council and outside the UN framework."<sup>17</sup> Apart from holding meetings at two distinct levels, a ministerial ("principals") level and a special envoys level, it has no formal structure. In relative terms, however, the Quartet tends to be more structured than other informal groups, similar to the Balkans Contact Group.<sup>18</sup> Quartet meetings are convened on an ad hoc basis, usually ancillary to other international gatherings like the opening of the United Nations General Assembly or Group of Eight (G8)

<sup>11</sup> Qerim R. Qerimi, "An Informal World: The Role and Status of 'Contact Group' Under International Law." *Chicago-Kent Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7, (2007): p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, "Press Statement by Security Council President on Middle East," October 25, 2001, available at: <<http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/eed216406b50bf6485256ce10072f637/3c542e959522ce5285256af100526e1c?OpenDocument>>.

<sup>13</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 1397, "Security Council Demands Immediate Cessation of All Violence in Middle East; Affirms Vision Of Two States, Israel And Palestine," March 12, 2002, available at: <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sc7326.doc.htm>>.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, "Statement by the President of the Security Council," April 10, 2002, available at: <<http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/eed216406b50bf6485256ce10072f637/e7d71a18d1d8ba4e85256b98004caf2a?OpenDocument>>.

<sup>15</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 1435, September 24, 2002, available at: <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/601/58/PDF/N0260158.pdf?OpenElement>>.

<sup>16</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 1515, November 19, 2003, available at: <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/621/85/PDF/N0362185.pdf?OpenElement>>. UNSCR 1515 also represented the first official reference by the Security Council to the regional dimension of the conflict in relation to Quartet.

<sup>17</sup> Jochen Prantl, "Informal Groups of States and the UN Security Council," *International Organization* 59 (Summer 2005): pp. 559–92. By contrast, "groups of friends" usually consist of "informal groups of states formed to support the peacemaking of the United Nations" and tend to be less formal and more hands-on than contact groups. See Teresa Whitfield, "A Crowded Field: Groups of Friends, the United Nations and the Resolution of Conflict" *Studies in Security Institutions* 1 (Center on International Cooperation, June 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Teresa Whitfield, *Friends Indeed? The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), p. 238.

## THE QUARTET

	Principals		Envoys	
United States	Secretary of State	Hillary Clinton	Special Envoy <sup>19</sup>	David Hale (acting)
Russia	Foreign Minister	Sergey Lavrov	Special Representative	Alexander Saltanov
European Union	High Rep. for FASC	Catherine Ashton	Special Representative	Helga Schmid
United Nations	Secretary-General	Ban Ki-moon	Special Coordinator	Robert Serry
	Quartet Representative (Tony Blair)			

summits, and often by conference call.<sup>20</sup> It has no secretariat or administration, and meeting agendas are likewise ad hoc.<sup>21</sup> In addition to its four members, the Quartet is also served by an official Quartet representative (previously known as the Quartet special envoy), which is discussed in detail in the second section of the paper.

While its formation may have been “accidental” on some level, the Quartet’s composition was considerably more calculated. Its membership reflects a deliberate effort to bring the four major international actors in the peace process under one diplomatic roof. Former UN envoy Terje Rød-Larsen, who was the driving force behind the Quartet’s creation, often described it as the perfect marriage of U.S. power, EU money, and UN legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> This description encapsulates the potentially complementary nature of the Quartet’s membership and the distinctive resources, sources of influence, and comparative advantages each of its members brings to bear on the process. Its composition is fairly unique among

contact groups in both size and membership. With two permanent members of the Security Council (P-5), two multi-state organizations, and no regional actors, the Quartet is more top-heavy and less balanced in its membership than other groups.

On the surface, the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia had coalesced around a common desire to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, yet each had its own complex set of motivations for joining the effort. These coincided with dramatic changes in the international environment, including an expanded and more assertive European Union and a U.S. administration that was becoming increasingly militaristic and unilateralist in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks. For all four actors, the Quartet offered a useful platform on which to play out their respective long-term interests in the region and vis-à-vis one another, as well as their own internal political dynamics and rivalries.

<sup>19</sup> Former U.S. senator George Mitchell served as U.S. special envoy for Middle East peace until resigning on May 20, 2011. Prior to Mitchell’s appointment in January 2009, the role of U.S. envoy was filled by the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

<sup>20</sup> Teresa Whitfield, interview with the author, December 2010.

<sup>21</sup> The March 21, 2010 Quartet meeting in Moscow, called at the behest of the Russians, remains the first and only time the Quartet met in “special session” rather than ancillary to other international gatherings.

<sup>22</sup> Meetings generally begin at the envoys level before convening the principals. After each meeting, an official statement or communiqué is released, usually on behalf of the Quartet principals.

## THE QUARTET'S TRACK RECORD

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The story of the Quartet is one of both success and failure—although not in equal measure (see Appendix I). While it would be almost impossible to look at everything the Quartet has done over the past decade, a few important cases may be enough to identify certain patterns. Of all its interventions, none are more illustrative of the Quartet's performance and modus operandi than the Roadmap and the Quartet Principles, the two most important and consequential actions taken by the group to date. Two other experiences offer additional insights into the Quartet's handling of crisis situations and its overall approach to conflict management: the May 2010 flotilla tragedy and the role of the Quartet representative.

### THE ROADMAP (APRIL 2003)

The publication of the Roadmap in April 2003 undoubtedly ranks as one of the Quartet's most notable achievements. For the first time since the 1947 UN Partition Plan, the international community succeeded in articulating a single, unified, and comprehensive vision for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, which included the creation of an independent Palestinian state. In addition to creating broad

international consensus around this vision, the Roadmap's subsequent endorsement by the Security Council (UNSCR 1515) gave it unprecedented international legitimacy. In theory, the introduction of the Roadmap was designed to correct a number of fundamental shortcomings of the Oslo process of the 1990s. The Roadmap was built on three key principles: the need for *parallel* rather than sequential (i.e., conditional) implementation, *monitoring* and accountability, and a clearly defined *end game*. Whatever theoretical or potential benefits the Roadmap might have offered, however, it was for all intents and purposes a dead letter.

The Roadmap was forged in the highly charged atmosphere that followed the 9/11 terror attacks and that led up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in early 2003. It was a direct response to the intense violence and bloodshed between Israelis and Palestinians, which peaked in the spring of 2002. More directly, the Roadmap grew out of consultations among Quartet members in the weeks after President Bush's contentious June 2002 speech in which he laid out his vision of Palestinian statehood and Middle East peace.<sup>23</sup> In addition to calling for the creation of “an independent, viable, sovereign Palestinian state

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<sup>23</sup> Rød-Larsen is widely credited with having conceived of the Roadmap in the summer of 2002: “I told [Assistant Secretary of State] Bill Burns that President Bush's vision statement is not enough. We need a plan, a *road map*, elaborating on the steps to be taken by each side.” However, the idea of an internationally-backed plan of some kind had been around since the Mitchell Committee recommendations, which Secretary-General Kofi Annan suggested could serve as a “bridge back to negotiations” a year earlier in May 2001. By April 2002, a number of similar plans were already in circulation, including a Jordanian-Egyptian initiative calling for a ceasefire and various confidence building measures (CBMs) to be monitored jointly by Egypt, Jordan, the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia, along with a “seven points plan” put forth by German foreign minister Joschka Fischer.

living in peace and security alongside Israel,” the president urged Palestinians to “elect new leaders... not compromised by terror.”<sup>24</sup> The development of the Roadmap was also influenced by the Arab Peace Initiative (API), which emerged around the same time and was adopted at the March 2002 Arab League summit in Beirut. Among other things, the API promised Israel full recognition and normalization by all twenty-two Arab states in exchange for its withdrawal to the 1967 borders and a “just and agreed upon” resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem.

Bush’s “vision” speech was met largely with disdain in Europe, the Arab world, and even by elements within his administration, but was seen as an opportunity to jump-start the peace process and energize the newly formed Quartet. A few weeks after the speech, the Quartet officially endorsed Bush’s vision of a Palestinian state and called for the development of an “action plan” that would include benchmarks to help the parties work toward that goal. The first draft of the Roadmap was prepared by the Danes, who at that time held the EU presidency, and was later approved at an August 2002 EU foreign ministers’ meeting. Soon after this, the United Nations and the Russians began preparing their own drafts. It was then that the Americans proposed consolidating the various drafts into a common document and assumed control of the process. Still, while its drafting was primarily an American-led operation, the Roadmap bore the unmistakable imprint of the European Union and the United Nations, particularly in its emphasis on the three principles noted above. An outline of the Roadmap was first presented publicly in September 2002, although the

draft went through several additional revisions before being finalized in late December.

The formulation of the Roadmap was one of the earliest examples of the Quartet’s value. It was a rather short-lived success, however. In the end, none of the three ostensibly corrective aspects of the Roadmap—parallelism, monitoring, and a clear end game—ever actually materialized. The first two were systematically eroded throughout the Roadmap’s development and ultimately abandoned in the implementation phase. The third, meanwhile, which consisted of the vision of two states living side by side, was simply too vague to generate real political progress or provide a meaningful political horizon. As one of the Roadmap’s U.S. coauthors, Flynt Leverett, has observed, “Beyond its mishandling of the settlements issue, the road map’s most significant flaw comes in its third and final phase, where not a single word is presented regarding the parameters for resolving the ‘final status’ issues—borders, Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees—at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”<sup>25</sup> Without a clear articulation of what the solution would look like, the parties would be doomed to an endless cycle of “talks about talks”—or, worse still, only the prospect of such.

The principles of parallelism and monitoring in particular, both of which were referenced explicitly in the text,<sup>26</sup> were seen as central to the Roadmap’s success, without which its two-state vision would remain elusive if not unattainable. Even before the Roadmap, these principles had been firmly established by the Quartet as ways of ensuring that both parties had a stake in progressing beyond the crisis

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<sup>24</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership,” June 24, 2002, available at: <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>>.

<sup>25</sup> Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, “A Road Map to Nowhere,” *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 2009, available at: <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/07/01/a\\_legal\\_mis\\_settlement?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/07/01/a_legal_mis_settlement?page=full)>.

<sup>26</sup> The preamble of the Roadmap states: “The Quartet will meet regularly at senior levels to evaluate the parties’ performance on implementation of the plan. In each phase, the parties are expected to perform their obligations in parallel, unless otherwise indicated.” Quartet Roadmap, April 30, 2003.

raging on the ground—the essential link between the Quartet’s twin goals of ending violence and restarting political negotiations. In its first official communiqué in April 2002, the Quartet described this approach and the rationale behind it:

We affirm that there must be *immediate, parallel and accelerated movement* towards near-term and tangible political progress, and that there must be a defined series of steps leading to permanent peace involving recognition, normalization and security between the sides, an end to Israeli occupation, and an end to the conflict....

The Quartet stands ready to assist the parties in implementing their agreements, in particular the Tenet security work plan and the Mitchell recommendations, including through a *third-party mechanism*, as agreed to by the parties.<sup>27</sup>

On both issues—parallelism and monitoring—a formal, albeit nominal, consensus was forged among all four Quartet members, as reflected in the Quartet’s various communiqués and the Roadmap itself. Yet in both cases, that consensus was overturned by a single member, the United States.

The Israeli government, already highly suspicious of the Quartet, rejected the entire Roadmap exer-

cise precisely because of its emphasis on these two principles, and openly derided both the plan and its sponsors.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the Roadmap’s focus on parallel implementation—as opposed to having Palestinians fulfill their obligations first—was sufficient for Sharon to try to “sink it,” as one former U.S. official put it.<sup>29</sup> Shortly after the final text of the Roadmap was agreed to in late December 2002, an Israeli non-paper was circulated to Quartet members calling for a number of changes, including making an end to violence, terrorism, and incitement a “pre-condition for any progress,” as well as for any monitoring effort to be “led and dominated by the USA” and subject to Israel’s approval.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of parallel versus sequential (i.e., conditional) implementation was hotly debated within the Quartet as well as within the Bush administration. Despite strong opposition from Israel and key White House officials to parallel implementation, the Quartet continued to reiterate the principle throughout the development of the Roadmap.<sup>31</sup> The State Department, which had primary responsibility for drafting the Roadmap,<sup>32</sup> shared the view of the other three Quartet members that parallelism was essential to keep both sides invested in carrying out their obligations. Key figures within the National Security Council (NSC), however, were in line with Sharon’s view that Israeli obligations, such as freezing settlements or redeploying to pre-Intifada positions, should be conditional on PA security

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<sup>27</sup> Quartet Statement, April 10, 2002. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> In fact, Israel had consistently refused any contact with the Quartet *qua* Quartet, preferring instead to deal with its individual members separately. Sharon and other members of his government repeatedly disparaged the Quartet, reserving some of their harshest criticisms for the Roadmap itself. Sharon himself reportedly told reporters, “Oh, the Quartet is nothing! Don’t take it seriously! There is [another] plan that will work.” Quoted in Chris McGreal “Sharon Derides EU Peace Efforts,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2003. Sharon’s spokesman Raanan Gissin likewise dismissed the plan as “not realistic ... There is nothing in that program that can be implemented.” “Sharon Gets Tough as Elections Near,” Associated Press, January 20, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Kurtzer, former U.S. ambassador, interview with the author, June 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with former UN official, July 2010.

<sup>31</sup> The Quartet first alluded to the Roadmap, at the time still under development, in September 2002: “The Quartet is working closely with the parties and consulting key regional actors on a concrete, three-phase implementation roadmap that could achieve a final settlement within three years. Comprehensive security performance is essential. The plan will not succeed unless it addresses political, economic, humanitarian, and institutional dimensions and should spell out reciprocal steps to be taken by the parties in each of its phases.” Quartet Statement, Sept. 17, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> The three primary U.S. authors of the Roadmap were Assistant Secretary of State Bill Burns and Deputy Assistant Secretary David Satterfield from the State Department and Flynt Leverett of the National Security Council.

performance and other reforms. Although the language in the Roadmap did allow some room for debate regarding the exact sequence of each side's obligations, throughout the Roadmap's development, its U.S. authors were wholly on board with the view that Israeli obligations would *not* be conditional on Palestinians meeting all their obligations first.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, for the first four years after the Roadmap's release, the United States allowed Israel's "security first" doctrine to supplant the principle of parallelism.<sup>34</sup>

The need for mutual accountability, another key failing of the Oslo process, was also central to Quartet policy and thinking. In fact, the Quartet's monitoring role is present in all three phases of the Roadmap, and is reflected in the various initiatives put forth by the international community prior to the Roadmap or the creation of the Quartet itself.<sup>35</sup> Even before the Roadmap's official release, a number of monitoring proposals were under discussion within the Quartet throughout the latter half of 2002 and early 2003. Although the United States had originally sought to have monitoring begin only in the second phase, it eventually agreed to a formula by which "informal monitoring" based on "existing mechanisms and on-the-ground

resources" and the creation of an "agreed, transparent monitoring mechanism" in Phase I (for the text of the Roadmap, see Appendix II).<sup>36</sup> The United States also agreed to the development of benchmarks so that monitoring could begin promptly upon the Roadmap's release. When the Roadmap's text was finalized in December 2002, all four Quartet envoys had endorsed a proposal prepared by the UN for an informal monitoring mechanism along with plans to consider a more robust mechanism in subsequent phases.<sup>37</sup>

By the time the Roadmap was formally released in April 2003, however, the Bush administration had reversed course. A few weeks after Mahmoud Abbas was sworn in as PA prime minister—something that had been a major U.S. and Israeli demand as part of efforts to reform the PA—the United States withdrew its support for the benchmarks paper, which had already been prepared and endorsed by the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia.<sup>38</sup> In the end, despite the strenuous efforts of various actors to set up an official monitoring structure, no Quartet monitoring mechanism, informal or otherwise, was ever established—not even one that clearly laid out a dominant role for the United States (see Appendix III for a proposed monitoring

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Kurtzer, interview with the author, June 2010; interview with senior State Department official, June 2010; interview with former UN official, July 2010.

<sup>34</sup> The Bush administration's policy formally changed with the launching of the Annapolis process in November 2007, thereafter considering Roadmap implementation to be parallel. This policy has continued, albeit more explicitly, under the Obama administration, as evidenced in recent Quartet statements explicitly noting that adherence to the Roadmap was "irrespective of reciprocity." See Quartet Statements, September 24, 2009 and March 19, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> The monitoring issue had been the subject of intensive debate and diplomatic activity since the outbreak of the Intifada in late 2000, but particularly since the Mitchell Committee and Tenet ceasefire plans of mid-2001. Whereas Europeans generally favored an "international observer force" to monitor the ceasefire, the United States, sensitive to Israel's opposition to any international presence, would agree only to "third-party monitors", intended to imply a mechanism comprised exclusively of Americans. In November 2001, however, Powell declared that "the United States remains ready to contribute actively to a third party monitoring and verification mechanism acceptable to both parties," suggesting a mechanism with broader international involvement. See Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, remarks at the McConnell Center for Political Leadership University of Louisville, Kentucky, November 19, 2001. Nonetheless, there was broad international consensus on the need for some sort of international monitoring. The first official endorsement of a Quartet monitoring mechanism was made in its April 2002 statement in connection with the Mitchell and Tenet plans, the forerunners to the Roadmap: "The Quartet stands ready to assist the parties in implementing their agreements, in particular the Tenet security work plan and the Mitchell recommendations, including through a third-party mechanism, as agreed to by the parties." Quartet Statement, April 10, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with former UN official, July 2010.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*



mechanism put forward by the UN).<sup>39</sup> In keeping with Israel's insistence that only the United States be allowed to monitor implementation and compliance, the Bush administration appointed its own envoy to check the parties' fulfillment of their Roadmap obligations.

In June 2003, shortly after convening a summit in Aqaba with Prime Minister Sharon and newly appointed Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas to officially launch the Roadmap, President Bush named Ambassador John Wolf as chief of the U.S. Coordination and Monitoring Mission for the Middle East peace process. The European Union, the United Nations, and Russia were not invited to the summit. Nor were they consulted prior to Wolf's appointment, although the Quartet duly endorsed his mission after the fact, noting rather hopefully that it would serve as "a credible and effective structure led by the United States, in close cooperation with the Quartet, to coordinate, monitor, and promote implementation of the parties' commitments and responsibilities, as laid out in the roadmap."<sup>40</sup>

Wolf's mission was as uneventful as it was short-lived. Not only was he prevented from discussing his findings publicly to avoid "embarrassing" the parties, it was clear that his mission did not have strong backing from the administration, evidenced by reports that Washington was working to undermine him.<sup>41</sup> On October 1, 2003, less than four months after his appointment, Wolf was recalled to Washington, effectively ending his mission.<sup>42</sup> Some indication of the degree of seriousness with which

the Bush administration viewed Wolf's mission can be gleaned from the description offered by a former senior U.S. official: "He was the Roadmap monitor. What did he have to monitor?... There was no security stuff early on.... So, there's nothing particularly to monitor. The cooperation grows over time, each year is better than the previous year, I'd say. But again, there's nothing really to monitor at that point. So, what is there? Settlements?"<sup>43</sup>

As the Wolf mission sputtered, Palestinians quickly became disillusioned with the Quartet. Senior Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) official Saeb Erekat accused the Quartet of doing "a disappearing act." According to Erekat, "The Americans pushed [the Quartet] aside, and they didn't want to confront the Americans."<sup>44</sup> Wolf's post remained vacant until January 2008, when President Bush appointed Lt. Gen. William Fraser to serve as the official U.S. Roadmap monitor. Fraser's appointment was in response to the re-launching of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at the Annapolis Peace Conference in November 2007 in which the parties agreed that "the United States will monitor and judge the fulfillment of the commitment of both sides of the road map."<sup>45</sup>

Both Fraser and his successor, Lt. Gen. Paul Selva, maintained the U.S. approach of refusing to publicize their findings or even to share them with the other three Quartet members. Further, neither had the authority to enforce compliance with the Roadmap, only to engage "in dialogue with Palestinians and Israelis and get the facts on what each of them is doing to implement the Road Map ... [while]

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<sup>39</sup> One draft proposal put forward by the UN, for example, called for the creation of a monitoring committee "composed of representatives of the UN, EU, and chaired by the U.S. Monitoring Coordinator, with staff drawn from the Quartet and others as appropriate." Document is on file with the author (entitled "Road Map Monitoring Mechanism: Draft 4/2/03").

<sup>40</sup> Quartet Statement, June 22, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Glenn Kessler, "Road Map' Setbacks Highlight U.S. Pattern," *Washington Post*, October 6, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Wolf returned to the region only once for a two-day visit in January 2004, mainly as a gesture to the EU, before officially resigning his post in August 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Elliott Abrams, former deputy national security advisor, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Saeb Erekat, quoted in John Ward Anderson and Molly Moore, "All Sides Failed to Follow 'Road Map,'" *Washington Post*, August 28, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Israel and the PLO "Joint Understanding" presented during opening remarks by US President George W. Bush at the Annapolis Conference. See U.S. Department of State, "President Bush Attends Annapolis Conference," November 27, 2007, available at: <<http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/2007/95695.htm>>

encouraging the parties to move forward on their obligations to complete the Road Map.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps more important, the fact that the Security Council later endorsed the Annapolis “joint declaration,” amounted, in the eyes of some, to an amendment of the Roadmap by formally transferring the monitoring role from the Quartet to the United States.<sup>47</sup>

The abandonment of the monitoring role, which was always viewed as central to the Roadmap’s success, marked the beginning of the Quartet’s process of self-marginalization.<sup>48</sup> Despite having fought hard for the inclusion of a Roadmap monitoring mechanism in the first place, EU and UN officials tend to downplay its absence today. According to former EU envoy Marc Otte, the lack of formal monitoring by the Quartet was not a serious problem because “we do our own monitoring, and there is nothing to prevent us from sharing that information with the U.S. or anyone else.”<sup>49</sup> The value of formal monitoring had little to do with the availability of factual information, however—there are literally dozens of Israeli, Palestinian, and international NGOs and governmental agencies, in addition to the envoys themselves, reporting on conditions on the ground virtually on a daily basis. Rather, what the process lacked was accountability, and a recognition of the link between the parties’ actions and its continued credibility.

By the time the Roadmap was officially released on April 30, 2003, it was already clear that neither

the United States nor Israel had any intention of implementing the plan as it was.<sup>50</sup> On the day of its release, U.S. consul-general Jeffrey Feltman observed that the document that had been the subject of such intense debate, compromise, and delay “is not a sacred text or treaty” and that its “words are meant to be a guideline, a starting point.”<sup>51</sup> Other Quartet members viewed this as the beginning of the United States’ attempt to back away from the Roadmap.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the process of dismantling the Roadmap was already underway well before its official release, beginning with the Bush administration’s decision to delay its publication for more than four months.

Although the Roadmap’s text was finalized in late December 2002, the United States refused to release it at that time as initially agreed due to Israeli pressure—with Israeli elections scheduled for January 2003, Sharon feared publication of the document could hurt his reelection bid. After Sharon’s reelection, however, the Bush administration declared it would not release the Roadmap until after the Iraq crisis was resolved. Finally, under pressure from U.S. allies like British prime minister Tony Blair, whose support for the Iraq war effort was critical and who had stressed the centrality of dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for its success, Bush agreed to release the Roadmap as soon as the PA appointed a “credible” prime minister.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, despite repeated assurances by the U.S. administration that the Roadmap itself was non-

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<sup>46</sup> The White House, “Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process,” January 10, 2008, available at: <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080110-7.html>>.

<sup>47</sup> Alvaro de Soto, former UN envoy, interview with the author, June 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Beatty “EU Backs Down on Own Role in Mid East,” *EU Observer*, May 23, 2003. See also Marc Perelman “With ‘Road Map’ Set, Battle Shifts To Its Implementation,” *The Forward*, April 11, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Marc Otte, former EU special representative, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>50</sup> The first indication that the Roadmap was not to be taken literally was the May 2003 end date for Phase I, which was not amended to account for the four-month delay in its release, allowing just one month for “Ending terror and violence, normalizing Palestinian life, and building Palestinian institutions.”

<sup>51</sup> Molly Moore and John Ward Anderson, “Mideast Plan is Formally Launched; ‘Road Map’ Delivered To Israel, Palestinians Amid Hope and Doubt,” *Washington Post*, May 1, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with former UN official, July 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, of the four leaders assembled at the March 16 Azores Summit representing the United States, Britain, Spain, and Portugal, British prime minister Tony Blair, Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar and Portuguese prime minister Jose Durao Barroso all refer to the Roadmap. Only President Bush did not, further fueling speculation that the administration was not serious about the Roadmap. For more on Blair’s attempts to convince Bush of the importance of the Roadmap, see Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), p. 433.

negotiable, it now held that implementation would be open to discussion.

Such discussions did take place, between the United States and Israel, and became the basis for effectively rewriting the terms of the Roadmap. The Israelis, while still adamantly opposing both the Quartet and the Roadmap, had adopted a dual strategy of working to amend the plan's most objectionable provisions while simultaneously trying to kill it. In the period prior to and immediately after its release, a number of high-level American and Israeli delegations traveled back and forth between Washington and Jerusalem, during which Bush administration officials agreed that, while no changes would be made to the text, the United States "would take into account the Israeli objections to the Roadmap" as it was being implemented, according to former national security advisor Stephen Hadley.<sup>54</sup> Parallel Israeli delegations were dispatched to New York and Washington to enlist the support of congressional and evangelical leaders in pressuring the administration to drop the Roadmap.<sup>55</sup>

Israel's official stance on the Roadmap would soon change, however. In addition to its blanket opposition to parallel implementation and robust monitoring, the Israelis also had objections to particular Roadmap provisions, such as those dealing with settlements. A few days after the Roadmap's release, Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and senior NSC staff member Elliot Abrams met in

Israel with Sharon and his chief of staff, Dov Weissglas, to define the terms of a "settlement freeze." Those arrangements were later formalized in an April 2004 letter from Weissglas to then-national security advisor Condoleezza Rice, whereby in lieu of its Roadmap obligation to "freeze[ ] all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)," Israel could continue building subject to a set of newly agreed "restrictions on settlement growth."<sup>56</sup>

On May 23, Powell and Rice issued a joint statement acknowledging Israeli concerns, in which the two declared: "The United States shares the view of the Government of Israel that these are real concerns, and will address them fully and seriously in the implementation of the roadmap to fulfill the President's vision of June 24, 2002."<sup>57</sup> That same day, Sharon issued a statement accepting the Roadmap,<sup>58</sup> which was formally approved by Israel's cabinet two days later. In doing so, however, Israel's government laid out the conditions on which its acceptance would rest:

The Government of Israel today accepted *the steps set out in* the Roadmap. The Government of Israel expresses its hope that the political process that will commence, *in accordance with* the 24 June 2002 speech of President Bush, will bring security, peace and reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Stephen Hadley, former national security advisor, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>55</sup> "Israeli Envoy Heads for U.S. to Lobby Against 'Road Map,'" Agence France Presse, May 4, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> The specific terms, first laid out by Sharon in Dec. 2003, were similar to previous exemptions and "loopholes" agreed between the U.S. and Israel: "There will be no construction beyond the existing construction line, no expropriation of land for construction, no special economic incentives and no construction of new settlements." See Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Letter from Dov Weissglas, Chief of the PM's Bureau, to National Security Adviser, Dr. Condoleezza Rice," April 18, 2004, available at: <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Letter+Weissglas-Rice+18-Apr-2004.htm>>.

<sup>57</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice," May 23, 2003, available at: <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030523.html>>.

<sup>58</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement from PM Sharon's Bureau," May, 23 2003, available at: <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2003/Statement+from+PM+Sharon-s+Bureau+-+23-May-2003.htm>>.

<sup>59</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Government Meeting about the Prime Minister's Statement on the Roadmap," May 25, 2003, available at: <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/government/communiques/2003/government%20meeting%20about%20the%20prime%20minister-s%20state>>. Emphasis added.

By accepting only “the steps set out in” the Roadmap rather than the plan itself, the Israeli government was releasing itself from the Roadmap’s specific sequencing. The references to Bush’s June 2002 “vision” speech in both the American and Israeli statements, meanwhile, was an affirmation of Sharon’s “security-first” doctrine. In other words, the Roadmap’s implementation would now be subject to the same conditionality that its authors had deliberately sought to avoid.

Appended to the Israeli cabinet’s statement were fourteen “remarks” outlining Israel’s official reservations to the Roadmap, which reiterated, among other demands, its insistence that Israeli obligations be contingent upon Palestinians meeting all of theirs first.<sup>60</sup> Although former Bush administration officials tend to downplay the significance of the “fourteen reservations,” it is clear that they were integral to the administration’s understanding of how the Roadmap was to be implemented. Consciously or not, most of the key positions and concerns contained in Israel’s fourteen reservations were adopted, applied, or otherwise pursued by the U.S. administration. In addition to the new understanding on settlements articulated in the Weissglas letter, these additional arrangements were codified in an exchange of letters between President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon in April 2004.<sup>61</sup>

Even after its formal launch in June 2003, the exact status of the Roadmap—including when or even whether it would go into force—remained unclear. While EU and other Quartet officials continued to push for non-conditional implementation, the United States adopted a decidedly conditional

approach. The first sign that Roadmap implementation would be contingent on Palestinian compliance came in early October 2003 after Mahmoud Abbas resigned as PA prime minister. The United States responded by abruptly suspending Ambassador John Wolf’s monitoring mission “until it becomes clear what kind of government the PA will form.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, throughout the subsequent period, senior U.S. administration officials repeatedly told Palestinian negotiators that “there is no Roadmap right now” due to the Palestinians’ failure to meet their obligations.<sup>63</sup> Thus, while conditionality had been expressly rejected by the Roadmap’s authors, the United States unilaterally reinstated it. The decision to make its implementation contingent on Palestinian reforms took the steam out of Roadmap, in that the party who most unequivocally accepted it, Mahmoud Abbas, was allowed to be marginalized.

According to Elliott Abrams, “The Roadmap took off well in 2003” and stalled only after Arafat failed to undertake genuine security and government reforms.<sup>64</sup> As early as July 2003, however, the Roadmap—and in the eyes of some, the Quartet itself—had already been pronounced dead. Ironically, this was one thing both Palestinian and Israeli officials could agree on at the time. “The reason the road map was accepted by the Palestinians was because it specified obligations for both sides, and the quartet was involved,” explained one senior Palestinian official. However, the official added, “The quartet is now dead, and there are no Israeli obligations. The road map is being used as a carrot and stick, but only on the Palestinian side.”<sup>65</sup> Likewise, an Israeli government official conceded, “The quartet

<sup>60</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Israel’s Response to the Roadmap, As Published on the Knesset Website,” May 25, 2003, available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Israel+Response+to+the+Roadmap+25-May-2003.htm>.

<sup>61</sup> See, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Letter from President Bush to Prime Minister Sharon” and “Letter from US President George W. Bush to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon,” April 14, 2004, both available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Exchange+of+letters+Sharon-Bush+14-Apr-2004.htm>.

<sup>62</sup> Lamia Lahoud, “FBI Team Meets PA,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 21, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer to Palestinian negotiators, as recorded by the author, April 2004; NSC senior advisor Elliot Abrams to Palestinian negotiators, as recorded by the author, September 2004 (notes on file with the author).

<sup>64</sup> Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>65</sup> John Ward Anderson “Palestinians Wary Of Peace Plan Shift; Some Call New Approach One-Sided,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 2003.

has been sidelined, and that means that a part of the road map doesn't exist. But we are committed to the end result of the road map."<sup>66</sup> This formula became the operative standard by which the Roadmap continued to be relevant. In other words, while "in practice the Roadmap was stillborn ... at the declaratory level it remained part of the official discourse" for some time to come.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the clearest sign of the Quartet's capacity for self-marginalization was its decision to get behind Israel's unilateral Disengagement Plan—a plan that was expressly intended to sideline the Roadmap and indefinitely postpone the Quartet's vision of a Palestinian state. Under the Disengagement Plan, Israel would remove all of its settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip<sup>68</sup> while continuing to build its "separation barrier" around East Jerusalem and the large settlement "blocs" in the West Bank. Sharon's announcement of the Disengagement Plan in December 2003 was warmly welcomed by the Bush administration, which had already been briefed in advance—a senior White House official had met with Sharon a month earlier to discuss the outlines of the plan. And, in late November, Condoleezza Rice and Sharon chief of staff Dov Weissglas held a follow-up meeting in Washington to discuss details of the plan, according to which Israel would provide a package of "goodwill gestures" to Palestinians and publicly demonstrate "endless devotion to the roadmap" in exchange for the fulfillment of all PA obligations under the Roadmap.<sup>69</sup> In announcing the plan, Sharon warned that unless Palestinians dealt effectively with security "in a few months,"

Israel would "initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians."<sup>70</sup> As details of the plan began to emerge, an unnamed U.S. official was quoted as saying, "The administration is gearing up to justify what Sharon is going to do. It will spell the end of the road map."<sup>71</sup>

Simultaneously, tensions between the United States and the other three Quartet members began to grow over the former's handling of the process since the Roadmap's release. The European Union, the United Nations, and Russia were also becoming increasingly concerned over what they viewed as U.S. complacency and inaction in the face of proposed Israeli unilateralism. With the Roadmap "completely paralyzed" and the Quartet itself "hostage" to U.S. inaction, EU officials warned they would not "accept putting the idea in the fridge for months.... If the United States says it does not want to do anything, then maybe we should organize an alternative."<sup>72</sup> The Russians meanwhile sought a more direct path to challenge the United States by sponsoring a UN resolution granting the Security Council a role in monitoring Israeli and Palestinian compliance with the Roadmap.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the brief display of will, and faced with the prospect of an even more diminished role in the process, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia eventually fell in behind the United States and the Disengagement Plan. In May 2004, the Quartet gave its official—if somewhat grudging—backing to the plan, which it stipulated "should provide a rare moment of opportunity in

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci, "What Should the European Union Do Next in the Middle East," CEPS Brief no. 112 (Center for European Policy Studies, September 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Although the Disengagement Plan also provided for the evacuation of four small settlements in the northern West Bank, this component of the plan was largely symbolic. Apart from the removal of some 500 settlers (out of a total of roughly 430,000 living in the West Bank at the time), the evacuation had very little impact on the lives of Palestinians in the area.

<sup>69</sup> "Plans and Meetings Everywhere," *Mideast Mirror*, November 28, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Ariel Sharon, "Speech to the Herzliya Conference," December 18, 2003.

<sup>71</sup> Guy Dinmore "Middle East politics: Road to Peace Disappearing from the Map," *Financial Times*, January 13, 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Robin Wright and Colum Lynch, "U.S. Pressed to Revive Mideast Peace Process; U.N., Europe, Russia Explore Alternatives," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

the search for peace in the Middle East” that “can be a step towards achieving the two-state vision and could restart progress on the roadmap.”<sup>74</sup> Four months later, the Quartet reaffirmed its support for the plan, but this time with the additional caveat that it “be undertaken in a manner consistent with the Road Map, as a step towards an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, through direct negotiations between the sides leading to the goal of two States, Israel and a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.”<sup>75</sup> Despite all of this, the extent to which the Quartet had been marginalized was further reflected in the paucity of official statements, which in all of 2004 consisted solely of the two referenced above.

As if responding directly to the Quartet’s appeal, Sharon’s top aide, Dov Weissglas, outlined the true nature and intent of the plan: “The disengagement plan is the preservative of the sequence [i.e., conditionality] principle. It is the bottle of formaldehyde within which you place the president’s [June 2002] formula so that it will be preserved for a very lengthy period. The disengagement is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that’s necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.”<sup>76</sup> Sharon himself trumpeted the Disengagement Plan as “a blow to the Palestinians, in that it will force them to give up on their aspirations [to statehood] for many years to come.”<sup>77</sup> Like the Oslo process itself, disengagement offered a way for Israel to separate from Palestinians without having to end the occupation—in other words, the opposite of what the Quartet had hoped it would be and what the Roadmap had set out to achieve. Sure enough, after the disengagement, the

Roadmap became a dead letter and the Quartet went into hibernation.

In his final report before leaving his post, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan lamented the Roadmap’s failure, and that of the Quartet: “We must admit our own weaknesses, and we have been too hesitant in emphasizing those very elements that most distinguish the road map from the Oslo process—parallelism, monitoring, and clear end goals. It is no surprise that today we find ourselves once again deadlocked.”<sup>78</sup> The abandonment of the Roadmap was in many ways the Quartet’s “original sin,” dealing a devastating blow to its credibility from which it has never fully recovered. The consensus that had been so painstakingly forged around the Roadmap was exposed as a farce. Any benefits the plan may have offered were effectively negated by the fact that it was never actually implemented. Instead, the plan succumbed to the divergent goals of the United States and the other three Quartet members, along with their desire to maintain the unity of the group at all costs.

Although it was the United States rather than the Quartet per se that undermined the Roadmap, this did not diminish the group’s culpability, given the acquiescence of the other three members. Whether certain aspects of the Roadmap were ever “realistic” to begin with is certainly subject to debate. However, the fact that they were negotiated at length and were themselves the product of various compromises suggests that they were both reasonable and plausible. The fact that the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia remained individually committed meant little in light of its abandonment by the Quartet, whose words and actions carried far more weight than any single member.

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<sup>74</sup> Quartet Statement, May 4, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Quartet Statement, September 23, 2004.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in, Ari Shavit, “Weissglas: Disengagement is Formaldehyde for Peace Process,” *Ha’aretz Magazine*, October 8, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Aluf Benn, “PM Says His ‘Hands Are Clean’ of Allegations He Took Bribes,” *Ha’aretz*, April 6, 2004, quoted in Anne Le More “Killing with Kindness: Funding the Demise of a Palestinian State,” *International Affairs* 81 (2005): pp. 981–99.

<sup>78</sup> UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East,” December 11, 2006, available at: <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/651/88/PDF/N0665188.pdf?OpenElement>>.

While there may have been little the three weaker powers could do to save the Roadmap or prevent American or Israeli unilateralism, their willingness to go along with the disengagement—however grudgingly—undoubtedly helped to facilitate, if not legitimize, it.<sup>79</sup> Whether a more serious effort to uphold the Quartet’s plan would have generated progress toward resolving the conflict is impossible to say. On the other hand, the Quartet’s decision not to do so clearly did not advance the cause of peace, and most likely set it back by degrading the credibility of the process and its sponsors. In any case, had it not been for the Quartet and its promise of a permanent seat at the table, it is unlikely the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia would have so readily abandoned their own plan in favor of one over which they had major reservations.

### THE QUARTET PRINCIPLES (JANUARY 2006)

On January 26, 2006, the Palestinian Islamist faction Hamas stunned its more secular Fatah rival, and the rest of the world, when it won 73 of 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, giving it control over the legislature as well as all PA ministries, including the newly created post of prime minister. It was the first time Hamas had ever openly contested PA elections (though it did take part in municipal elections the year before and won a substantial number of mayorships and local councils). Hamas’s rejection of the Oslo Accords had led it to boycott previous elections for the PLC in January 1995 and for the PA presidency in January 2005. Hamas’s decisive election victory in 2006 posed a number of challenges for the Quartet, as well for Israel, Fatah, and neighboring Arab states.

On one level, the rise to power of an Islamist party through democratic means challenged conventional thinking regarding the nature of the Islamist “threat” in general and about the assumptions underpinning the Bush administration’s Freedom Agenda in particular. Specifically, it brought into question the prevailing view that Islamist movements were inherently antidemocratic and that democracy was the antidote to Islamist “extremism.” At the same time, the election of a movement openly opposed to a negotiated settlement with Israel and one that had engaged in horrible acts of violence against civilians posed a direct and seemingly insurmountable obstacle to the peace process and the goal of a two-state solution.

The day after Hamas’s election victory, the Quartet issued a statement congratulating the Palestinian people and their leadership “on an electoral process that was free, fair and secure” and called on the international community “to respect the results of the election and the outcome of the Palestinian constitutional process.”<sup>80</sup> The innocuous statement did little to conceal the growing anxiety and dissension within the Quartet over how to deal with the new situation. After several days of intensive consultations internally as well as with Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab leaders, the Quartet laid out the basis by which its relations with the newly elected PA would be determined. In its January 30 statement, “the Quartet concluded that it was inevitable that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government’s commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap.”<sup>81</sup> These three criteria, known as the Quartet Principles, continue to define official Quartet policy with regard to dealings with Hamas and any future configuration of the PA that might include it.

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<sup>79</sup> Kris Bauman, “The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process,” p. 166.

<sup>80</sup> Quartet Statement, January 26, 2006.

<sup>81</sup> Quartet Statement, January 30, 2006.

Although the formula has no standing in international law, it has assumed a kind of semi-legal status, particularly among American and Israeli policymakers, many of whom regard it as both immutable and binding. The Quartet Principles, although ostensibly representative of a consensus among all Quartet members, mask deep divisions within the group. Those divisions played out in dramatic form during the Quartet's internal deliberations in advance of the January 30 announcement. According to former UN envoy Alvaro de Soto, an initial U.S. draft sought to make all international assistance to the Palestinians explicitly conditional on their adherence to the three principles. The United Nations opposed the proposal, however. In arguing that donor aid be delinked from the principles, de Soto claims he was subjected to a "heavy barrage" from Assistant Secretary of State David Welch and Deputy National Security Advisor Elliot Abrams, including implicit threats to cut U.S. support for the UN budget.<sup>82</sup> In the end, the envoys adopted compromise language indicating only that a review of donor aid would be "inevitable."

De Soto maintains that the Quartet Principles were never intended to be conditions placed on the Palestinians.<sup>83</sup> Abrams disputes de Soto's account, both on the alleged threat to cut UN funding and on the question of conditionality:

The principles had two effects, on contact policy and aid policy. That was the whole purpose of them—to take a stand and put

on pressure. To delink them from assistance policy, i.e., to keep throwing money at [ Hamas prime minister Ismail ] Haniyeh as if Hamas were just fine despite its continuing acts of terror and its amazing Charter, would have been politically impossible and also wrong. . . . As to his latter point about threatening to cut the UN budget, that's silly. I remind you again that the UN was not an aid donor so in the discussion of assistance policy it was anyway silent.<sup>84</sup>

De Soto's attempt to portray the Quartet Principles as anything other than conditions seems untenable, if only because they were almost universally interpreted as such.<sup>85</sup> As Abrams explains:

If you look at tough statements by [ German chancellor Angela ] Merkel and [ EU high representative Javier ] Solana, for example, and various statements at Quartet press conferences, it is *very* clear that they were precisely meant as conditions. At least one must say they were so meant by the U.S. and EU; the UN was not an aid donor and was in a somewhat different situation.<sup>86</sup>

Statements by EU officials seem to confirm Abrams's understanding of the EU position.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the United Nations and Russia continued to oppose the conditioning of aid throughout Annan's tenure. As Abrams points out, however, since neither of them were actually donors to the PA, they

<sup>82</sup> Alvaro de Soto, "End of Mission Report," May 2007, p. 18, available at: < <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2007/06/12/DeSotoReport.pdf>>.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>84</sup> Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>85</sup> The language contained in subsequent Quartet statements makes it virtually impossible to conclude that the Principles represented anything but conditions. For example: "The Quartet recalled its view that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles outlined above." Quartet Statement, March 30, 2006. Likewise: "The donor members noted their willingness to work toward the restoration of international assistance to the Palestinian Authority government once it has committed to these principles." Quartet Statement, May 9, 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>87</sup> For example, see Javier Solana, quoted in the Thomas Wagner "Solana says Hamas Must Change if it is to Keep Receiving EU Funds," Associated Press, January 31, 2006. See also, Javier Solana, "Europe's Unwavering Support to the Palestinian People," *Al Hayat*, April 24, 2006, available at: < <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EGUA-6P6SAD?OpenDocument>>.



could do little to counter the official U.S. and EU positions.

In any event, the question became moot on March 7, 2006, when the United States and the European Union formally suspended direct assistance to the PA. Since its formation in 1994, the PA had been sustained by the contributions of international donors, amounting to roughly one quarter of its budget in 2005. The decision to withhold international aid, with which virtually all donors including Arab states complied, amounted to an international sanctions regime. Israel's nearly simultaneous decision to withhold valued add tax (VAT) revenues collected on Palestinian imports, which accounted for some 60 to 70 percent of all PA revenue, triggered a severe economic and humanitarian crisis throughout the occupied territories.

In the first year of the boycott, the Palestinian economy declined from a 6 percent growth rate the previous year to a contraction of minus 5 percent by the close of 2006. In this same period, the shortage of public funds meant that PA employees received on average approximately half their normal salaries, leading to widespread strikes and further disruption of vital government services.<sup>88</sup> Unlike other aspects of the PA budget, VAT revenues are not derived from international donor aid but from money paid by Palestinian businesses, and held by Israel in escrow before being transferred to the PA—in other words, it is Palestinian money. Although the European Union and the United Nations separately called on Israel to release the VAT funds, de Soto claimed the Quartet was “prevented from pronouncing on this because the U.S. ... does

not wish Israel to transfer these funds to the PA.... [This] has in effect given Israel a free pass, enabling them to argue that withholding these monies is in conformity with Quartet policy.”<sup>89</sup>

The competing claims by Abrams and de Soto highlight the vast divergence of views within the Quartet. Any pretense of Quartet unity regarding its collective response to Hamas's election, as embodied in its January 30 “consensus” statement, quickly evaporated in the weeks and months that followed. Over time, as Palestinian economic and humanitarian conditions worsened as a result of the boycott of the PA, it became increasingly clear the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia had quite different understandings of what their new policy meant, and how to put it into effect. These differences spanned the entire spectrum from the United States' “no aid/no contact” position to Russia's call for engaging Hamas in a dialogue in the hope of moderating its positions, with the EU position leaning more toward the American one and the UN position more like that of Russia. The growing dissension within the Quartet's ranks only added to the sense of confusion regarding its mission and further eroded its standing with the parties.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the apparent similarity in their positions, in practice the goals of the United States and the European Union diverged rather sharply. Like the United States, the European Union had officially designated Hamas a terrorist organization, forcing it to suspend direct aid to the PA. Nonetheless, the European Union sought to devise a formula by which to continue channeling aid into Palestinian

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<sup>88</sup> International Monetary Fund—The World Bank, “West Bank and Gaza Economic Developments in 2006—A First Assessment,” March 2007, available at: <<http://www.imf.org/external/np/wbg/2007/eng/032607ed.pdf>>.

<sup>89</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” p. 33.

<sup>90</sup> Costanza Musu, “The Madrid Quartet: An Effective Instrument of Multilateralism?” (paper presented at “Globalization, Security and the Legitimacy of the G8,” conference sponsored by the Royal Institute for International Relations, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and G8 Research Group, Brussels, May 24–25, 2007), p. 15 available at: <<http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/conferences/2007/musu2007.pdf>>.

hands, if only to prevent a complete collapse of the PA—in which both the Europeans and others had invested billions of dollars over the previous decade. Consequently, the European Union proposed creating a “temporary international mechanism” (TIM) consisting of an internationally managed trust fund operated by the PA presidency, thus bypassing the Hamas-led PA, that would provide limited direct assistance to Palestinian civil servants and contractors working on vital services.

Though it had the backing of three Quartet members, along with Arab states, the World Bank, and other donors, the United States and Israel opposed the TIM (or any proposal that allowed donor aid to continue). The highly divisive atmosphere within the Quartet was on display at the April 27, 2006 Quartet meeting in London, convened to discuss the TIM. After the meeting, one Western diplomat involved reportedly accused U.S. officials of “recklessly trying to engineer the collapse of the PA’s systems” on the assumption that this would bring down the Hamas-led government and a return to Fatah rule.<sup>91</sup> Although the United States eventually relented and agreed to the creation of the TIM, the episode soured internal Quartet relations and deepened the divide among its members. It was also around this time, April 2006, that former World Bank president James Wolfensohn formally resigned his position as Quartet special envoy, a position that was established one year earlier to oversee Israel’s planned withdrawal from Gaza. Since his mission focused on improving the economic conditions of the Palestinians, a goal rendered unworkable in light of the international boycott of the PA, Wolfensohn saw no point in continuing in that capacity.

The Quartet Principles did more than just expose divisions among the group’s members; they also highlighted many of the internal inconsistencies in the positions of individual Quartet members themselves. The European Union’s stance, for example, was difficult to pin down and became somewhat fluid over time. Although the EU position started off sounding similar to that of the United States, the European Union increasingly sought to distance itself from the hard-line U.S. position. Solana repeatedly emphasized that the European Union had not “boycotted” nor “imposed sanctions” on the Palestinians, noting that the European Union had actually provided more financial assistance to the Palestinians after the election than before.<sup>92</sup> The UN position was equally fluid, though in the opposite direction. Whereas Annan had tried to avoid the conditioning of aid on compliance with the Quartet Principles, his successor, Ban Ki-moon, “accepted it unreservedly,” according to de Soto.<sup>93</sup>

The Russian position was perhaps the least coherent of all. It is difficult to reconcile statements by Russian officials that they “would not support any efforts to cut off financial assistance to the Palestinians” and that their “position on Hamas is different from that of the United States and Western Europe”<sup>94</sup> with their official endorsement of the Quartet consensus declaring it “inevitable” that such assistance “would be reviewed by donors against that government’s commitment to the principles...”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, compare the former statement with the following by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov: “Russia has a clear position, as stated by President Putin: it would be wrong to deny aid to the Palestinians simply because they democratically elected a legitimate government, and it’s turned out to be

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<sup>91</sup> Akiva Eldar, “Washington Blocking Direct Donations to Palestinians,” *Ha’aretz*, May 4, 2006.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Javier Solana, “Middle East Peace is a Priority,” *Palestine Times*, November 30, 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Alvaro de Soto, interview with author, June 2010. According to de Soto, it was Ban’s acceptance of conditionality that prompted the former’s resignation as UN special coordinator in May 2007.

<sup>94</sup> Peter Finn, “Putin Says Russia, U.S. Differ on Hamas Win,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Quartet Statement, January 30, 2006.

Hamas. The Europeans share this view. So does the United Nations.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, not only was the language of the Quartet Principles vague enough to allow for conflicting interpretations, but the positions of Quartet members themselves were sufficiently confusing as to promote contradictory understandings of the positions of one another.

In addition to the highly contentious disagreements over what the Quartet Principles meant, divisions also surfaced over how to move beyond them. The crisis, both within the Quartet and inside the PA, intensified after the Mecca Agreement in February 2007, which took place against the backdrop of increasing factional violence between Hamas and Fatah members in Gaza and elsewhere. Under the agreement, the two factions agreed to a power-sharing arrangement within a new national unity government. A number of major powers, including France, Britain, and Russia, welcomed the unity government, and the European Union announced that it was prepared to work with any non-Hamas members of the new government. Shortly after the new cabinet was sworn in, EU envoy Marc Otte met with the new PA foreign minister, Ziad Abu-Amr, who in turn was invited to a number of European capitals for consultations. However, the Bush administration made it clear, both before and after the Mecca Agreement, that it would not accept any government that included Hamas.

In the end, neither the changes in the PA’s composition nor in the positions of individual Quartet members would have any discernable impact on Quartet policy. Despite the willingness demonstrated by various individual actors to move beyond the crisis,

the Quartet’s official response, delivered after intense debate on February 9, 2007, essentially reiterated the three principles as they were—the course preferred by the Bush administration.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. officials continued to affirm to President Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that there would be no change in U.S. or Quartet policy regarding compliance with the three principles.<sup>98</sup> Subsequent Quartet statements largely reiterated the same conditions, but with one notable addition inserted into a March 21, 2007 communiqué. Along with the standard language on recognition, disarming, and past agreements, the Quartet added “that the commitment of the new government in this regard will be measured not only on the basis of its composition and platform, but also its *actions*.”<sup>99</sup> According to Kris Bauman’s detailed study of the Quartet, the new language, which was introduced by the European Union with UN and Russian backing, was intended as “opening, however slightly, a door for Hamas.”<sup>100</sup>

The fact that the United States agreed to the new language suggested that it, too, was prepared to judge Hamas by its behavior rather than its ability to match a particular formula word for word. On the other hand, it could simply have meant administration officials were divided on the matter, with those favoring a shift in policy temporarily winning out.<sup>101</sup> Whether the new language was a result of a genuine softening in the Bush administration’s position or, as seems more likely, a reflection of internal disagreement, however, was of little consequence. Regardless of its intent, the new language did little to change the situation—nor could it, since the determining factor had never been the

<sup>96</sup> Elena Suponina, “Lavrov: That Would Be an Invitation to a Very Large War in the Mideast,” *Defense and Security*, March 17, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Kris Bauman, “The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process,” p. 200.

<sup>98</sup> Laurie Copans, “Israel, U.S. Agree not to Recognize Palestinian Government that Does Not Moderate,” Associated Press, February 18, 2007.

<sup>99</sup> Quartet Statement, March 21, 2007. Emphasis added.

<sup>100</sup> Kris Bauman, “The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process,” pp. 193–94.

<sup>101</sup> Whereas official White House statements tended to emphasize the standard “no contact” line, other official U.S. statements, including by the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, suggested a somewhat less hard-line stance. See, for example, Joel Greenberg, “Olmert Rules Out Peace Talks; Wants Palestinian Government to be Further Isolated,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 2007; and Stephen Hadley, interview by Wolf Blitzer, *Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer*, CNN, March 18, 2007, available at: <<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0703/18/le.01.html>>.

Quartet's choice of words but how one particular actor, the United States, chose to interpret them. The episode also served as a reminder of how the Quartet's penchant for muddled language ultimately worked to limit rather than create opportunities. The U.S. position with regard to boycotting a Hamas-led PA would have been the same and the United States would probably have sought to push this view on other international actors irrespective of the Quartet. However, it could not have done so as effectively or with the same force of authority as it did through the Quartet.

In other words, contrary to the prevailing logic within the Quartet, involvement in the group did harm the individual positions of its members. While participation in the Quartet may not have changed the substance of its members' positions, it most certainly altered their value. Whereas the positions of the three weaker Quartet members were diminished in value, those of the United States took on even greater importance. This was a point Bush administration officials understood well, as Abrams explains:

We'd wrestle over this—what words would be acceptable to everybody. But on the Quartet Principles, this became critical. This was a huge victory for the U.S. The Russians were out there meeting with Khaled Meshaal, so it certainly wasn't their policy. The Europeans were divided, with a hard line by the French and Merkel. Others had a much softer line about what do you do ... about Hamas after the election, and after Mecca. You've got a period of practically a year and a half where there are divisions, and the Quartet is the mechanism for trying to minimize them and maintain

some kind of common line, which I would say was closer to our line than anybody else's line....

That was important because nobody could [then] say, "Who cares what George Bush thinks." [A Quartet statement] was more significant than just an American position.<sup>102</sup>

The Mecca Agreement was a watershed moment, and one that could have paved a way out of the crisis and dramatically improved the situation for the parties and Quartet members, who remained deeply divided. Instead, the Quartet chose to overlook the opportunity, allowing the situation to become worse. A few months later, in June 2007, after several more rounds of sporadic factional violence, Hamas forces routed Fatah-dominated PA forces and seized control of the entire Gaza Strip.

The period immediately after the adoption of the Quartet Principles and the ensuing boycott of the PA marked the closest the group had ever come to formally breaking up.<sup>103</sup> The experiences of the Bosnia Contact Group during the 1990s offers some instructive lessons about a group as deeply divided as the Quartet: "That Group members were not willing to disband, but were instead prepared to expend so much energy on the maintenance of a united front, suggests that other goals were at least as important as that of conflict management."<sup>104</sup> As with its counterpart in the Balkans, "the focus on maintaining a show of public unity at all costs" was equally true of the Quartet. The cause of Quartet unity had no greater champion than the European Union's Javier Solana, who feared the group's dissolution would lead to even more "violence and despair" on the ground.<sup>105</sup> As Bauman explains:

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<sup>102</sup> Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>103</sup> Amos Harel, "Quartet Leaders Consider Ending their Activity," *Ha'aretz*, May 2, 2006 (Hebrew).

<sup>104</sup> Helen Leigh-Phippard, "The Contact Group on (and in) Bosnia," *International Journal* (Spring 1998): p. 324.

<sup>105</sup> Kris Bauman, "The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process," p. 193.

The concern of the EU was that disbanding the Quartet, in spite of the meager appearance of its efforts to those on the ground, could lead to even more violence. EU members also felt they could have more influence over US policy from inside the Quartet than they could from outside the mechanism. So the EU remained in the Quartet, but it began to make its disagreements more widely known.<sup>106</sup>

Ironically, Hamas's takeover of Gaza may well have saved the Quartet by removing the single most potent source of internal conflict. Several days after Hamas seized control in Gaza, Abbas dissolved the cabinet and appointed a new caretaker government led by Salam Fayyad, prompting the United States and the European Union to provide support for the new PA government in the West Bank. Although the boycott would remain in place in relation to Gaza, the Quartet was no longer paralyzed by internal divisions, allowing it to remain intact. Since then, the Quartet has pursued a policy focused on promoting prosperity in the West Bank while tolerating—if not openly endorsing—the ongoing blockade of Gaza. More than four years on, this approach has failed to dislodge Hamas from power or significantly change its political program. Instead it has sowed the seeds for a number of additional crises.

Whether Solana's dire prediction would have materialized is impossible to know. But it is difficult to imagine more "violence and despair" than what took place during the Gaza War ("Operation Cast Lead") in the winter of 2008–09, which resulted in nearly 1,400 dead, some 15,000 homes severely damaged or destroyed, and the displacement of more than 50,000 Palestinians.<sup>107</sup> Apart from the

enormous human and humanitarian toll inflicted by Cast Lead and the continued blockade on Gaza's population, the zero-sum formula enshrined in the Quartet Principles helped lay the foundations for the political division that has paralyzed Palestinian politics for four years, and which has only recently begun to be reversed. As a result, Palestinians were forced to choose between national unity, an essential component of any "state-building" exercise, and international assistance, without which no state could come into being. Thus, not only did the principles fail to advance the Quartet's goals, they actively impeded prospects for a negotiated peace and the emergence of a Palestinian state by undercutting the very institutions the international community had invested so heavily in building and by, in effect, conditioning the resumption of a political process on the continuation of Palestinian division.

The new Hamas-Fatah reconciliation agreement, signed in Cairo on May 4, 2011, represents the first crack in what everyone agrees is an unsustainable status quo. Though it is not yet clear how—or if—the agreement will be implemented, it is already testing the viability of the Quartet Principles, and perhaps even the Quartet itself. Within days of the deal's signing, even before a new Palestinian government was formed, Israel suspended the transfer of some \$89 million in tax revenues to the PA, although U.S. and EU pressure later forced it to resume payments. As of the time of writing in January 2012, the Quartet had not yet formulated an official response to the deal. But it is unlikely to engage in a repeat of the 2006–07 boycott, if only because its members are even more divided now than they were then. Thus far, only the United States has referred explicitly to the Quartet formula in connection with the agreement, while the European Union remains divided.<sup>108</sup> Both the United

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 193–94.

<sup>107</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), "Human Rights in Palestine and other Occupied Arab Territories: Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict," September 15, 2009, available at: <[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/UNFFMGC\\_Report.PDF](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/UNFFMGC_Report.PDF)>.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Andrew Rettman, "EU Exploring Better Relations with Hamas," *EU Observer*, May 4, 2011, available at: <<http://euobserver.com/24/32261>>.

Nations and Russia have welcomed the deal, as have key EU states like France, which had also said it would increase its aid to the PA by \$14 million to help offset the Israeli tax transfer suspension.<sup>109</sup>

Although the Quartet's record has been mixed at best, disbanding the group would have come at an intolerably high price—if not for the Palestinians and the peace process than at least for the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia, and their continued involvement in it. Internal divisions over how to deal with Hamas and Gaza were present from the very outset, just as they were with regard to the Roadmap monitoring mechanism and the Disengagement Plan. Yet, when faced with the choice between standing firm and risk being sidelined by the United States or acquiescing and remaining “relevant,” the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia consistently chose the latter. For all three, breaking up the Quartet was the least desirable of all options since it would have meant losing their seat at the table.

Were it not for the Quartet, nothing like the Quartet Principles could have come into being. The United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia would have retained their individual positions with no attempt to pass off their opposing views as some kind of common stance or “consensus.” Even if they had, there would have been no international mechanism that would have allowed them to do so—particularly given the United States' and Israel's aversion to the Security Council and other UN bodies. While the United States and Israel would likely still have severed ties and imposed economic sanctions on the PA after Hamas's election victory, it is unlikely the rest of the international community would have felt the same pressure to go along. Even if Europe had

joined them in doing so initially, the EU consensus would most probably have broken down following the Mecca Accord. Likewise, with no international umbrella to legitimize them, the principles could not have assumed the sort of quasi-legal status that they have today. Finally, without the threat of an all-encompassing, internationally sanctioned boycott looming over Abbas's head, his Fatah leadership may not have been forced to choose between two otherwise essential—if not existential—requirements for statehood: international acceptance and national unity.

### THE FLOTILLA CRISIS: THE QUARTET “AT ITS BEST”?

The true value of the Quartet, like any group, rests in its ability to act in the collective in ways that are either not possible or are not as effective as actions taken by its individual members. One example frequently cited by American, European, and UN officials is the critical role the Quartet played in easing Israel's blockade of Gaza following the deadly May 2010 Israeli raid on an international aid flotilla attempting to reach Gaza. There is some debate as to which international actor was most responsible for initiating the change in Israel's policy, but most agree that the Quartet was the primary vehicle for pressuring Israel to alter its position.

Owing to the efforts of the United Nations, the matter of easing the blockade had already been pushed through the Quartet several weeks before the flotilla incident. In its March 12, 2002 communiqué, the Quartet called for a solution to the Gaza crisis that “ensures the opening of the crossings to allow for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, consistent with United Nations Security Council

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<sup>109</sup> “France Ups Palestinian Aid as Israel Holds Tax Funds,” Agence France Presse, May 9, 2011.

resolution 1860 (2009).<sup>110</sup> Up until the raid on the flotilla, U.S. officials had mostly bought into Israel's argument that extensive security measures and monitoring to prevent weapons smuggling into Gaza would be needed before any changes could be made in the blockade regime, a position that the United Nations and many others in the international community opposed. In the wake of the flotilla tragedy, however, the United States shifted course and supported the UN position to ease the blockade, while the terms of the policy change were brokered by Quartet representative Tony Blair.

A UN-led initiative propelled by American power and influence, and put into effect by the official Quartet representative, was seen as a clear case of "the Quartet at its best." This perspective, while more or less factual, nonetheless relies on a rather narrow field of vision. In particular, it fails to acknowledge the central role the Quartet played in creating the conditions that originally led to the blockade, namely the adoption of the Quartet Principles and the de facto endorsement of the U.S.-led boycott of the PA that began in early 2006. More important, it ignores the circumstances that gave rise to the flotilla in the first place, specifically years of Quartet inaction in the face of harsh conditions in Gaza. Although the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza had been known for years,<sup>111</sup> and the issue had already been acknowledged in the Moscow statement of March 2010, the Quartet did not take decisive action until several hundred international civilian activists, nine of whom were killed by Israeli commandoes, took matters in their own hands and in effect forced it to do so.

In other words, the change in Israel's blockade policy was less a result of concerted Quartet action in the weeks after the flotilla crisis than of its *inaction* in the three years that preceded it; the Quartet was compelled to act not out of a need to address Gaza's deteriorating humanitarian situation, which had been known for some time, but because it had become clear that if it did not act others would. The fact that Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu chose to announce the new policy while standing alongside Quartet representative Tony Blair<sup>112</sup> suggests that even the Israelis had come to see the value of Quartet involvement, mainly as a way of conferring on it a degree of international legitimacy.

The flotilla crisis also highlighted, in rather dramatic fashion, another of the Quartet's major failings: its persistent inability to drive the agenda in the very matters it was charged with resolving. What the combined power, influence, and resources of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia had failed to achieve over a period of several years was in the end accomplished by a ragtag coalition of international activists. This inability to *shape* events rather than merely respond to them had become a hallmark of the Quartet well before the flotilla incident, as evidenced by its handling of the Gaza disengagement, the Hamas election, the 2008–09 Gaza War, and other crises. And, the ability to set the political agenda, once central to the Quartet's mission, has all but disappeared. In fact, not since the Roadmap's release in early 2003 has the Quartet succeeded in introducing relatively new ideas or breaking new political ground into the

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<sup>110</sup> Quartet Statement, March 12, 2010.

<sup>111</sup> The Quartet first expressed "concern" over conditions in Gaza as early as September 2007, at which time it also "expressed its urgent concern over the continued closure of major crossing points given the impact on the Palestinian economy and daily life," but stopped short of calling for opening those crossings. Quartet Statement September 23, 2007.

<sup>112</sup> See Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Remarks by PM Netanyahu and Tony Blair, Quartet Envoy to the Middle East," June 20, 2010, available at: <[http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2010/Remarks\\_PM\\_Netanyahu\\_and\\_Quartet\\_Envoy\\_Tony\\_Blair\\_20-Jun-2010.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2010/Remarks_PM_Netanyahu_and_Quartet_Envoy_Tony_Blair_20-Jun-2010.htm)>.

peace process—and even then, the precedent was rather short-lived.

### THE QUARTET REPRESENTATIVE: THE EXCEPTION THAT PROVES THE RULE

There is one notable exception to the Quartet's lack of formal structure: the position of Quartet representative, currently held by former British prime minister Tony Blair. Like the Quartet itself, the emergence of the position was largely ad hoc. The post was created in April 2005 by U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice when she appointed former World Bank president James Wolfensohn to serve as Quartet special envoy (QSE). Over the course of the next year, Wolfensohn played a crucial role in coordinating Israel's August 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, particularly during negotiations over the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA). Wolfensohn's mission, which lasted only one year, ended abruptly shortly after Hamas's election victory. With his mission of securing Gaza's economic recovery rendered unworkable,<sup>113</sup> and having fallen out with Bush administration officials, Wolfensohn resigned his position in April 2006. The post remained vacant until July 2007, when President Bush appointed Tony Blair to the position, which was renamed office of the Quartet representative (OQR).

Wolfensohn and Blair, both U.S. appointees, were given relatively narrow mandates focusing on assisting Palestinians in areas of economics, development, and institution-building. Both the OQR and the QSE, unlike the Quartet itself, were equipped with a full-fledged institutional structure, including an office based in East Jerusalem, a formal staff, and

an operating budget.<sup>114</sup> Although neither was given an explicit political mandate, Wolfensohn and Blair have played an important role in supporting the Quartet's political objectives at various times. Wolfensohn was particularly crucial in ensuring Israel's withdrawal from Gaza occurred in a smooth, timely manner. Likewise, Blair's support for Palestinian state-building efforts and other interventions like the easing of Israel's blockade of Gaza in mid-2010 have led to concrete improvements on the ground.

It may be tempting to view the appointment of an official Quartet representative as a tangible expression of the Quartet's commitment to the goal of two states. However, the impetus behind the mission may be linked to other U.S. objectives related to the peace process. Overall, the presence of the Quartet representative, particularly under Tony Blair, has helped channel EU, UN, and Russian involvement away from the diplomatic process. In addition to bolstering American control of the peace process, depoliticizing the role of the Quartet in this way also made the group more palatable to Israel. The fact that a loose, informal contact group would have a formally designated and officially mandated envoy is perhaps the most conspicuous inconsistency with the mission. No other international contact group has anything like the Quartet's "super-envoy."<sup>115</sup> As one former UN official put it, the role of the OQR is not just contradictory; its very existence is "an aberration."<sup>116</sup>

While on the surface the OQR may look like the operational arm of the Quartet, in reality, there is no institutional or administrative link between the two—a phenomenon noted by a number of former

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<sup>113</sup> James D. Wolfensohn, Testimony to the Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, *Post-Palestinian Election Challenges in the Middle East*, hearing, March 15, 2006, available at: <<http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/WolfensohnTestimony060315.pdf>>.

<sup>114</sup> OQR staff, like that of the QSE, is comprised of a dozen or so individuals drawn from the missions of Quartet members, the World Bank and others, including non-Quartet members such as Australia, as well as local Israeli and Palestinian staff, usually provided by the World Bank. The head of mission is always an American, usually an ambassador-level official seconded by the State Department.

<sup>115</sup> Teresa Whitfield, interview with the author, October 2010.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with former UN official, July 2010.



staff members of both missions, as well as by U.S. and other Quartet officials.<sup>117</sup> The mission was neither created nor “mandated” by the Quartet but rather by the United States. Although the envoy/representative often meets with Quartet principals to keep them apprised of his work, he does not report to them as such. Rather, the mission generally sets its own priorities, usually in consultation with senior U.S. officials. Under both Wolfensohn and Blair, the mission has functioned more like an appendage to the Quartet than an integral part of it, a source of considerable frustration for staff members of both missions. In fact, only recently, under the Obama administration, did working level OQR staff begin attending meetings at the envoys level.

That a political entity like the Quartet would be served by an official envoy focused exclusively on issues of economic development and Palestinian institution-building is yet another curious feature of the mission. After all, these were areas in which there was no shortage of third-party interventions, including by the World Bank, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, and a multitude of bilateral donor agencies. Palestinian institution-building, and later “reform,” has been a primary focus of the Quartet since its inception. Nevertheless, the mandates given to Wolfensohn and Blair were far too narrow, fragmented, and detached from the political process to have any meaningful impact, particularly in the case of the Blair mission.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, there were other more central Quartet objectives that were not being addressed and that could have benefited from a dedicated mission like the Quartet representative, such as the role of Roadmap monitor for example.

But the role of the missions was also shaped by the men who occupied them. Both Wolfensohn and Blair are high-profile, well-connected, and prominent personalities—one in the world of global finance and development and the other in the political and diplomatic sphere. But that is where the similarities end. The contrast between the two men and how they perceived their missions could not have been more striking. On the one hand there is Wolfensohn, a seasoned entrepreneur-turned-diplomat with no formal experience in politics who, despite this, was intent on playing a very political role throughout his tenure. On the other hand there is Blair, a quintessentially political figure who resisted public calls, and perhaps his own inclinations, to play a more overtly political role and instead has remained loyal to his narrow economic mandate, on which he had no particular expertise. Whereas Wolfensohn antagonized U.S. officials and had his mission unceremoniously shut down after one year, Blair, now in his fifth year, has had the full backing of two U.S. administrations.

From the outset, Wolfensohn seemed intent on pushing the limits of his mandate—which may also explain why his mission ended as abruptly and contentiously as it did. Shortly after his appointment, Wolfensohn began to use an economic recovery plan previously prepared by the World Bank as a way to leverage progress on the political front.<sup>119</sup> Wolfensohn saw the plan, which had inherent political implications, as a sort of “last gasp effort” to save the peace process and the two-state solution.<sup>120</sup> This put him in direct confrontation with the Israeli side, particularly during negotiations over what became the Agreement on Movement and Access in the fall of 2005, and Israelis complained bitterly

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<sup>117</sup> Interviews with former U.S. and Quartet officials, and former staff members of both missions.

<sup>118</sup> For a sample of the type of work the OQR is involved with, see Office of the Quartet Representative, “Office of the Quartet Representative Secures Extension of Tarkumiya Crossing Opening Hours,” January 13, 2010, available at: <<http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/quartet/news-entry/office-of-the-quartet-representative-secures-extension-of-tarkumiya-crossin/>>.

<sup>119</sup> Among other things, the plan noted the following: “Of itself, Israel’s Disengagement Plan of June 6 will have very little impact on the Palestinian economy and Palestinian livelihoods, since it only proposes a limited easing of closure. A focus on this over-arching issue is essential if disengagement is to deliver long-term benefits.” See, The World Bank, “Disengagement, the Palestinian Economy and the Settlements,” June 23, 2004, available at: <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/psannexdiseng.pdf>>.

<sup>120</sup> Nigel Roberts, former World Bank country director for West Bank/Gaza, interview with the author, July 2010.

to the Americans. According to Wolfensohn and others, senior U.S. officials responded by sidelining him and taking over the discussions. Eventually Secretary Rice was brought in to resolve the dispute and Wolfensohn resumed his role in time for the signing of the agreement. However, tensions remained high between him and key administration officials, some of whom accused Wolfensohn of over-stepping his limits.<sup>121</sup>

As someone with both sufficient technical expertise and extensive diplomatic and financial contacts, Wolfensohn seemed a logical choice to oversee the revival of Gaza's economy. In contrast, the appointment of Blair, a quintessentially political figure with no particular expertise in economic development, was more difficult to explain. Blair's appointment in July 2007 sparked considerable speculation both inside and outside the Quartet, much of which focused on when and how—rather than whether—Blair would seek to expand his role into the political realm. Initial reports surfaced that Blair was actively lobbying to expand his mandate, claims both he and administration officials denied.<sup>122</sup> Some Quartet members also feared that Blair might seek to “institutionalize” the Quartet. However, neither of these scenarios materialized. The Blair mission has remained functionally and institutionally separate from the Quartet, and despite occasional forays in overt diplomacy Blair has largely remained within his narrow mandate.

In a well-publicized 2007 open letter, ten European foreign ministers urged Blair to expand his mandate while noting that the Roadmap “has

failed” and that the status quo was “leading nowhere.”<sup>123</sup> Around the same time, a similar letter was sent by the Palestinian leadership to the four Quartet members.<sup>124</sup> The fear was that without a duly empowered envoy both the Quartet and the peace process would continue to flounder. No one understood this better than James Wolfensohn, who urged Blair to learn from his own experiences:

My worry for Tony Blair is that if you read the mandate he has—it's exactly the same as mine. It talks about helping both sides, helping the Palestinians, but there's nothing there about negotiating peace. I would only hope that there's a greater mandate given to him, because even with the superior standing that he has over the standing I had, if he doesn't have a mandate.... If halfway through the negotiations your office is closed and someone takes over the negotiations, you have to say you failed....

I have no doubts that I may have made tactical, strategic mistakes, but the basic problem was that I didn't have the authority. The Quartet had the authority, and within the Quartet it was the Americans who had the authority. It was not a Quartet decision to close the office.... There was never a desire on the part of the Americans to give up control of the negotiations, and I would doubt that in the eyes of Elliot Abrams and the State Department team, I was ever anything but a nuisance.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> “Is it Time for Wolfensohn to Leave?,” *Ha'aretz*, March 15, 2006.

<sup>122</sup> See Conal Urquhart, Julian Borger, and Ian Black “Palestinians Call for Blair's Role to Include Policing Israeli Pledges,” *The Guardian*, July 11, 2007; Sylvie Lanteaume, “U.S. Resists Pressure to Expand Blair's Mideast Mandate,” *Agence France Presse*, July 15, 2007.

<sup>123</sup> The letter was signed by the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Rumania, and Slovenia. For the full text, see “Open Letter to Tony Blair from the Ten Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Mediterranean Members States of the European Union, Published in ‘Le Monde’ Newspaper,” July 10, 2007, available at: <<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/3ED826E1434F0EF785257354006F433B>>.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Saeb Erekat to Quartet Principals, July 9, 2007. (Document on file with the author.) See also Conal Urquhart, Julian Borger, and Ian Black, “Give Blair wider Responsibility, say Palestinians,” *The Guardian*, July 11, 2007, available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jul/11/israelandthepalestinians.tonyblair>>.

<sup>125</sup> “All the Dreams We Had Are Now Gone,” *Ha'aretz* interview with Wolfensohn, July 19, 2007. See also Written Submission of Nomi Bar-Yaacov before the House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Security, *The Middle East: Eighth Report of Session 2006–07*, report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence, Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed July 25, 2007, available at: <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmfaff/363/36305.htm#a6>>.

Members of the Bush administration seem to have internalized a different set of lessons, however.

Key among those lessons was the need to provide Blair with a more clearly defined mandate in order to avoid a repeat of the Wolfensohn debacle. For his part, Wolfensohn has said that other than what was stated publicly, his mandate was never clearly spelled out at the time of his appointment,<sup>126</sup> a claim U.S. officials dispute. Shortly after Blair's appointment, formal terms of reference were drawn up to codify his mission and a State Department lawyer was sent to explain his mandate to him. As a result, the Bush administration "kept Blair in a very tight box," according to a former U.S. official.<sup>127</sup> Like Wolfensohn, Blair understood that his role would be inherently political, but he has been far more reluctant to push the limits of that role. While he did from time to time attempt to push back on those walls, Blair has remained for the most part, as one former official put it, a "good soldier" in sticking to his mandate.<sup>128</sup> This may have been due to the relatively low importance U.S. officials attached to Blair's mission, a source of much frustration for Blair—and one which he may have helped foster by, what one former OQR staff member described as, his "constant refusal to confront the Israeli authorities in situations where prior commitments were clearly not being upheld."<sup>129</sup>

Although there's been no change in the OQR's mandate, the political stature of the Blair mission has increased considerably over the years. So much so that Blair is often seen as a *de facto* Quartet member, albeit a non-voting one. Moreover, on the few occasions when Blair stepped out of his "box" it was usually at Washington's behest. The flotilla

incident, discussed above, was one prominent example. More telling, however, was the role Blair played before, during, and since the September 2011 Palestinian UN bid. As a divided and paralyzed Quartet receded into the background, Blair was all too eager to fill the diplomatic void. In close consultation with the Obama administration, Blair exerted tremendous efforts attempting to dissuade the Palestinians from their UN strategy and working to coax the parties back to the negotiating table. In the process, the Quartet representative succeeded only in incurring the intense ire of the Palestinian leadership, which has all but written him off. An October 10, 2011 statement by the PLO declared Blair to be "unwelcome because he violated his mission as neutral envoy of an international committee that aims at achieving just peace in the region," but stopped short of boycotting him officially.<sup>130</sup>

The question remains why the United States—or the Quartet for that matter—would see the need for a dedicated "super-envoy" instead of making use of the many existing envoys already dispatched by the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations. The best explanation may lie in the origins of the mission itself, beginning with Wolfensohn's appointment in 2005. Although Wolfensohn's role was instrumental throughout the Gaza withdrawal, it is difficult to ignore the fact that he was appointed to oversee a process that was not only outside of the Roadmap—the Quartet's *raison d'être*—but was expressly designed to neutralize both of them. That the United States was prepared to invest the time and resources into launching such a mission reflects the extent to which the Bush administration's goals were aligned with those of Ariel Sharon rather than those of the Quartet. While Wolfensohn's tenure

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<sup>126</sup> Wolfensohn's mission officially consisted of two primary areas: "[1] Methodology of withdrawal, including disposition of assets. [2] Economic issues related to post-withdrawal revival of the Palestinian economy, including investment and financing issues." See, Quartet Statement, April 15, 2005.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with former U.S. administration official, August 2010.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Interview with former OQR staff member, May 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Mohamed Mar'i, "Blair Unwelcome in Palestinian Territories," *Arab News*, October 10, 2011.

may not have gone as planned, the rationale behind the creation of his mission was clearly not in step with the Quartet's stated mission, as reflected in the Roadmap, and the official Quartet consensus.

A similar explanation can be found for Wolfensohn's successor. Although Blair may have lacked the requisite technical expertise, he had other assets that made him attractive to the United States. In addition to his political stature, Blair had also been a loyal ally in the Bush administration's effort to drum up international support for overthrowing Saddam Hussein in 2003. Most important, he was a firm believer in the "security first" approach and its ancillary "reform" agenda espoused by Bush. Perhaps not so coincidentally, Blair's involvement in Palestinian reform efforts date back to December 2002 when the then-British prime minister hosted the first Palestinian reform conference shortly after the creation of Task Force on Palestinian Reform (TFPR).<sup>131</sup> Like the OQR, the now defunct TFPR was created by the Quartet at the behest of the United States ostensibly to provide international backing for Palestinian reform efforts and lay the foundations of a Palestinian state. Indeed, the OQR is in many ways an attempt to resurrect the reform agenda of the Quartet's early days, under the more disarming rubric of "state-building."<sup>132</sup> But the problems with the OQR's mission, like those of its two predecessors, are even more systemic.

In the current U.S. approach to the peace process, which has persisted under both the Bush and

Obama administrations, the political, security, economic, and humanitarian aspects of the conflict are treated as separate and distinct phenomena. "This artificial distinction," according to one former U.S. official, "is one of the conceptual flaws of [Blair's] narrow mandate."<sup>133</sup> According to aid specialist Anne Le More:

Given Israeli reluctance to end the occupation and relinquish territorial control, there has been a fundamental contradiction between the aid enterprise's ambitious political *raison d'être* (to resolve a conflict between *two* parties) and a minimalist technical interpretation of the role and mandate of the aid community (emergency support, socio-economic development and institution-building directed only at *one of the two* parties), as if these could be insulated from the broader trilateral diplomatic setting underpinning the conflict and what has actually been happening on the ground. Although the explicit aim of aid has been actively to support the search for a peace settlement (which necessarily involves both parties to the conflict), the role of donors has been largely reactive. In addition, the multilateral incentive structure has only been targeted at the Palestinians.<sup>134</sup>

Despite its artificiality, this arrangement served two key functions. First, it preserved and solidified the

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<sup>131</sup> The TFPR was comprised of the four Quartet members in addition to Norway, Japan, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

<sup>132</sup> According to Anne Le More: "Reform, good governance and democracy only came to the forefront of the donor agenda in mid-2002, in the context of a bankrupt and delegitimized PA in need of external budgetary support, amid widespread accusations that donors were financing Palestinian corruption and terrorism, and calls by some governments, notably the United States and Israel, for regime change and the removal of Arafat. From the outset, the reform effort was thus conceived as a technocratic exercise aimed at improving—and for some changing—the regime. It did not mark a turning point in the international community's strategic understanding of what building a viable Palestinian state would entail politically. Not surprisingly given its opportunistic focus, the reform effort quickly lost momentum and the measures achieved to date have remained largely cosmetic even if some noticeable improvements have been made in the field of financial transparency." See Anne Le More, "Killing with Kindness: Funding the Demise of a Palestinian State," p. 993.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with former US administration official, August 2010. For a more thorough analysis of the role of economics and foreign aid in disaggregating the peace process, see Michael Keating, Anne LeMore, and Robert Lowe, eds., *Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: the Case of Palestine* (London: Chatham House, 2005).

<sup>134</sup> Anne Le More "Killing with Kindness: Funding the Demise of a Palestinian State," p. 98.

traditional division of labor within the peace process, consisting of U.S. preeminence over the political (i.e., negotiations) and security tracks,<sup>135</sup> EU prominence in economic and development assistance, and the UN's focus on humanitarian work.

Second, and just as important, it helped shift the focus of the Quartet from mediating between two parties to managing (and often micromanaging) the affairs of one them—the Palestinians. The emphasis on reform, state-building, and economic issues helped to depoliticize the peace process (including EU, UN, and Russian involvement in it) and normalize the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, as Le More explains, “by focusing on its socio-economic consequences rather than addressing its political root causes.”<sup>136</sup> This “microlateralist” approach, much like the subversion of the Roadmap earlier, reflected a deeper American and Israeli desire to deemphasize the Quartet's political mediation role, which necessarily entails parallelism and mutual accountability. As crucial as “state-building” was, however, without a parallel process of de-occupation and decolonization it was unlikely to succeed.

Despite the many differences between the two envoys, the Wolfensohn and Blair missions have one important thing in common: both were initially

conceived not as integral components of the Quartet's mission—as embodied in the Roadmap—but as alternatives to it. Accordingly, their narrowly focused economic and institution-building mandates were not intended to complement the diplomatic process but as alternatives to it. At the same time, there were distinct advantages in having a U.S.-appointed “super-envoy” with an ambiguous mandate, particularly at times of crisis or political stalemate. Indeed, the Wolfensohn and Blair missions both emerged at times of crisis and intense political division—the former during the Disengagement Plan after the sidelining of the Roadmap and the latter following Hamas's election and the ensuing boycott of the PA. The fact that Blair could be recruited to serve as a stand-in for the diplomatic group whenever they were too divided internally, too opposed to the U.S. position, or both, such as during the run-up to the Palestinian UN bid, also proved immensely valuable to the United States. Overall, the role of Quartet representative, particularly under Tony Blair, has helped to reinforce American dominance of the process while making the Quartet more palatable to Israel by channeling EU, UN, and Russian involvement away from the diplomatic process and by depoliticizing the role of the Quartet generally.

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<sup>135</sup> Although often hailed as a great success story in Palestinian “state-building,” the PA's record on security is mixed at best. According to Yezid Sayigh, an expert on Palestinian security performance: “The West's limited focus on technical assistance rather than governance and institution building and its disjointed overall approach—along with the lack of coherence and autonomy in the West Bank [Palestinian Authority Security Force]—are largely responsible for the sector's failure to develop its own training and planning capabilities.” See Yezid Sayigh, “Policing the People, Building the State: Authoritarian Transformation in the West Bank and Gaza,” Carnegie Paper, February 2011, p. 1, available at: <<http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=42924>>.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 995.

## WHY THE QUARTET DOES NOT WORK

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As discussed in the previous section, the Quartet's record has not been especially impressive either as a vehicle for resolving the conflict or in the more limited but no less crucial role of crisis management—that is, when the group was not excluded from the process altogether. Even so, the absence of success is not in of itself an indication of failure, particularly given the numerous constraints imposed on the Quartet from within and without. As proponents of the Quartet correctly point out, there are plenty of other factors to account for such failures, including the inherent difficulties of attempting to resolve a century-old conflict and the roles of the Palestinians and Israelis themselves. Given the varied understandings of what the Quartet actually is and does, assessments of performance tend also to be in the eye of the beholder, sometimes spanning polar extremes.

Most U.S., EU, UN, and Russian officials, while acknowledging the Quartet's shortcomings, generally hold that it has advanced the peace process in tangible and significant ways. Had it not been for the Quartet, it is argued, there would have been no Roadmap, and thus, no international commitment to a Palestinian state; and without either of these, there would have been no support for Palestinian state-building efforts, no changes to the Gaza blockade, and so on. To its critics, on the other hand, not only has the Quartet long since outlived its

utility but it has had a far more deleterious impact on the process than any of its members care to admit. The same Quartet that produced the Roadmap, for example, also authored the so-called Quartet Principles, which many see as helping to perpetuate the division within the PA and the blockade of Gaza.

So, how *should* we assess the Quartet? Ultimately, the Quartet's value should be determined not by what it has or has not achieved but by whether the peace process as a whole has benefited from its involvement. Here, it is crucial to distinguish between the interests of the Quartet and its members on the one hand and those of the two principal parties to the conflict on the other. To put it another way: Has the Quartet's involvement been a net asset or a net liability to the process itself?

Early on, the Quartet did have a positive impact, first by drawing the United States back into the process during the early Bush years and later by laying out a plan for resolving the conflict in the form of the Roadmap. Since then, the Quartet's influence has on balance been rather negative. Whatever advantages the Quartet may have offered initially have been largely negated or overtaken by the group's subsequent interventions. This was demonstrated most dramatically by its response to Hamas's 2006 election victory. In addition to exposing deep fissures within its ranks, the Quartet Principles helped

pave the way for a brief Palestinian civil war and a debilitating split within the Palestinian Authority in 2007, which has paralyzed Palestinian politics and crippled the peace process as a whole.

The Quartet's failings stem from three main factors: its loose, informal structure; the imbalance of power and interests in its composition; and a lack of genuine consensus among its members. The combination of the Quartet's highly malleable structure and lopsided membership, while largely unavoidable, led to a tendency to paper over genuine and often far-reaching differences among its members in the interest of maintaining group cohesion, which generally served its members' own interests. The fact that the Quartet could be all things to all people allowed its most powerful and vested member, the United States, not only to dominate the mechanism but to effectively transform it into something other than what it was originally intended to be.

### ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

One of the key advantages of informal groups like the Quartet is their ability to bypass some of the structural constraints imposed on formal international mechanisms like the Security Council. Unlike the council, whose ability to act is subject to inherent limitations imposed by its membership, availability of resources, and other competing priorities, informal groups have (at least theoretically) greater flexibility to act and the ability to devote their energies to a single issue.<sup>137</sup> In the case of the Quartet, however, its loose, informal structure has been a double-edged sword. While the Quartet's lack of structure is not the sole, or even primary, source of its problems, it does provide something of an enabling environment for the more tangible and fundamental deficiencies.

The absence of an institutional structure is seen as essential to the Quartet's proper functioning, maximizing the collective impact of its members while maintaining their individual freedom of action. Despite being more formal than other contact groups, its members firmly oppose attempts to further institutionalize the Quartet's structure. As an informal group that comes together only when collective action is warranted, individual actors are not bound by Quartet decisions or restricted from pursuing their own independent policies and positions. This is evident in the wide range of views among its members on various aspects of the conflict, which are frequently at odds with official Quartet positions. Take, for example, the European Union's declaration expressing the need for Jerusalem to serve "as the future capital of two states,"<sup>138</sup> or the UN secretary-general's regular references to the "illegality" of Israeli settlement activity, both of which go beyond current U.S. policy. Likewise, whereas the United States and, to a lesser extent the European Union, maintain strict prohibitions on dealings with Hamas, due to its official designation as a terrorist organization, Russia maintains ongoing contacts with the group.

Proponents of the Quartet also insist that while the United States remains the dominant political actor, the need for consensus forces it to consult with its international partners in ways that it might not otherwise be inclined. Moreover, it is argued, the participation of actors like the European Union and the United Nations allows them to play a greater political role than they would (or could) on their own and that this has made Quartet positions *normatively* better than they would have been had the United States acted alone—as exemplified chiefly by the Roadmap itself, which bears the unmistakable imprint of the European Union, just as Quartet

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<sup>137</sup> See Jochen Prantl, "Informal Groups of States and the UN Security Council," pp. 559–92.

<sup>138</sup> Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process," 2985th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, December 8, 2009, available at: <[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/111829.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/111829.pdf)>.

statements often reflect the normative positions of the United Nations.<sup>139</sup> While this sounds logical enough, and may have been true at one point, it is simply not how the Quartet operates or has operated for most of its history.

Though there are no formal constraints on individual Quartet members, their freedom of action can be, and often is, impeded by their involvement in the mechanism. Since internal decisions are based on consensus, Quartet positions necessarily reflect the *lowest common denominator*. This, combined with the need for outward displays of unity, naturally led to a predilection for vaguely worded or watered-down formulations that were open to multiple interpretations. That is to say nothing of how (or whether) such decisions may or may not be implemented later, which was itself a function of the Quartet's internal power dynamics. In addition to exacerbating internal divisions, such illusory consensuses—however well-intentioned—have complicated, rather than facilitated, Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking.

Despite being ad hoc and informal, the Quartet has attained a considerable degree of authority and international legitimacy. Whatever individual Quartet members may say about East Jerusalem, settlements, or Hamas simply does not carry the same political and diplomatic weight as positions expressed by the Quartet. Moreover, since the significance of the Quartet lay in its ability to speak with a single, authoritative voice, it must represent more than just a collection of its members.

The Quartet's perceived authority was enhanced by the official endorsement of the Security Council

itself, which highlights another unique feature of the Quartet. Whereas other informal groups have tended to be more effective when working in tandem with the UN system, particularly the Security Council,<sup>140</sup> the Quartet has for all intents and purposes replaced the Security Council as the international address for all matters related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including and especially the peace process. The Palestinians' decision to turn to the United Nations in September 2011 was an attempt to break free of this process, which has not served their interests.<sup>141</sup>

These contradictions in the Quartet and its role have allowed it to become all things to all people. On the one hand, the Quartet had sufficient legitimacy to serve as an authoritative reference for the peace process when such authority was deemed useful by its members—as in the case of the Quartet Principles. On the other hand, it has remained informal and flexible enough to allow its members to ignore those aspects deemed less desirable—such as the Roadmap. Determinations about which aspects have been observed and which have been ignored have been a function of the internal power dynamics within the Quartet. This arrangement has been especially advantageous for the United States and Israel, both of whom have been rather averse to UN involvement in the peace process, especially by the Security Council.

## LOPSIDED MEMBERSHIP

The Quartet's membership is rather unique among contact groups. While there is no set formula, an effective group generally “includes a balanced mixture of members, able to comple-

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<sup>139</sup> See, for example, Quartet Statement, March 21, 2010, which contains references to “international law” and strong stances against Israeli violations in East Jerusalem.

<sup>140</sup> See Jochen Prantl, “Informal Groups of States and the UN Security Council,” p. 585.

<sup>141</sup> For an outsider's take on how the UN bid served Palestinian interests, see Alvaro de Soto, “Palestine's UN Cliffhanger, Then and Now,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 21, 2011, available at: <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68289/alvaro-de-soto/palestines-un-cliffhanger-then-and-now>>.



ment each other in the support they bring to the mediation.”<sup>142</sup> This typically involves some combination of P-5 members, relevant regional actors, donor states, and other parties with a direct stake in the conflict or influence with the parties. The Quartet, by contrast, includes the two largest donors to Israel and the PA (the United States and the European Union), but no regional actors or other direct stakeholders. Two of its members are permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States and Russia), which is in itself a concern.<sup>143</sup>

This unusually top-heavy arrangement was clearly a response to the conditions that existed at the time of the group’s formation. The Quartet’s composition was also to some degree shaped by lessons drawn from previous experiences in multilateralism, namely the Multilateral Steering Committee (MSC), which was established at the 1991 Madrid Conference.<sup>144</sup> The exclusion of the Israelis, the Palestinians, and other regional actors was designed to avoid certain design flaws of the MSC, which was hobbled by its rather large size (thirteen members) and by the ability of individual members (including the parties to the conflict themselves) singlehandedly to veto progress. More important, the Quartet reflects a conscious desire to move away from a process that was to a large extent driven by the parties to one that was led by the international community.<sup>145</sup>

Though the two mechanisms had very different functions, they both served as vehicles for key international actors like the European Union

and others to be involved in the process without jeopardizing America’s preeminent role.<sup>146</sup> The fact that the MSC’s membership included donors and other supporters, several Arab states not directly involved in the conflict, the parties themselves, and the two cosponsors of the peace process (the United States and Russia) made it quite different from the Quartet. Unlike the MSC, therefore, the Quartet represents a distinctly *top-down* approach.

In attempting to avoid the pitfalls of the MSC, the Quartet may have gone too far in the other direction. Notwithstanding Rød-Larsen’s overly optimistic metaphor, the Quartet’s membership is characterized by a significant imbalance in both power and interests that directly affects how the group operates on the ground, irrespective of its stated positions. This is manifested most dramatically in the unmitigated dominance of the Quartet by the United States, as both its most powerful member and the one with the highest concentration of interests in the conflict, as well as the absence of any countervailing powers that might offset this imbalance, particularly regional stakeholders.

#### MISSING: REGIONAL ACTORS

The absence of regional actors from the Quartet’s membership is unusual in comparison to other international contact groups, particularly in a conflict with such a distinct regional dimension. The lack of regional stakeholders is all the more difficult to comprehend in light of the crucial role played by

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<sup>142</sup> Teresa Whitfield, “A Crowded Field: Groups of Friends, the United Nations and the Resolution of Conflict” Studies in Security Institutions 1 (Center on International Cooperation, June 2005), p.10.

<sup>143</sup> As Whitfield explains: “A dominance of permanent members of the Security Council among the [members] may limit the opportunities presented... in a peace process unless their interests align with the expressed goals of the UN.” Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> The MSC, now defunct, was established in January 1992, to oversee the multilateral negotiations launched in parallel with the bilateral track at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference (Oct./Nov. 1991). Its membership included the United States, Russia, Canada, the EC, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and the PLO (Syria and Lebanon were both invited to join but refused to do so without progress on the bilateral track). Two additional actors observed but did not participate: the UN which had “observer” status, and Norway, considered a “special guest.” Although the MSC did not directly oversee bilateral talks between Israel and its various Arab neighbors, it did hear reports from the AHLC, created in 1994 after Oslo (and whose membership is quite similar), regarding donor assistance to the Palestinians—much as the Quartet does today.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with former UN official, July 2010.

<sup>146</sup> Dalia Dassa Kaye, “Madrid’s Forgotten Forum: The Middle East Multilaterals,” *Washington Quarterly* 20 (1997): p. 172.

countries like Egypt and Jordan, both of which have formal peace treaties with Israel—and hence could not reasonably be considered parties to the conflict—as well as considerable influence with the Palestinians. In addition, the two countries had played a pivotal role alongside (and in some ways ahead of) the four big powers at the time the Quartet was formed.<sup>147</sup> In fact, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan had reportedly sought to include Egypt and Jordan in a “four plus two” arrangement, though it never materialized.<sup>148</sup>

The exclusion of regional actors helped foster an institutional disconnect with the parties by denying them any meaningful ownership over Quartet proceedings.<sup>149</sup> This led eventually to calls “to institutionalize its consultations with relevant regional parties.”<sup>150</sup> It also fostered an atmosphere in which Quartet members were more inclined to prioritize their own needs and interests above those of the parties themselves,<sup>151</sup> particularly in light of their divergent and often competing priorities. Moreover, without a formal role in the process, key Arab stakeholders, whether from the “pro-peace” (Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia) or the “rejectionist” (Syria, Lebanon, etc.) camps, have no direct stake in its success. The fact that most regional actors were denied any direct role as anything other than donor states may also help explain the habitual failure of many Arab countries to live up to their financial commitments to the Palestinians.

The exclusion of Arab actors also denied the Quartet the ability to tap into the substantial political and diplomatic assets the Arabs have to offer, including the Arab Peace Initiative (API) of 2002.

The API, which coincided with and in many ways complemented the Roadmap, presented a unique opportunity to merge the disparate efforts of the broader international community with those of regional stakeholders into a more coherent and comprehensive peace effort. While it is true the Arabs did little by way of “operationalizing” or marketing their initiative, the fact that they remained outside the official address of the peace process made it all the more difficult for them to do so, both psychologically and practically. Had the Quartet included, or at least more closely involved, key Arab actors it might have given them an “on-ramp” by which to pursue the API, as well as the political incentive to do so.

Although conditions in the region today do not allow for a resumption of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, the lack of regional involvement in the Quartet may also help explain why it never seriously took on the regional dimension of the conflict. Apart from occasional and largely pro forma references to “comprehensive peace, including Syria and Lebanon” in the Roadmap and official communiqués, and despite the fact that U.S., EU, UN, and Russian envoys all had regional mandates, the Quartet’s “jurisdiction” was confined exclusively to the Israeli-Palestinian arena. Not once, for instance, did the Quartet address the 2006 Lebanon War, either before, during, or after the fighting, though it was taken up rather extensively at the Security Council.

#### THE “QUARTET SANS TROIS”

That the United States should come to dominate the Quartet is neither surprising nor especially

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<sup>147</sup> The Jordanian-Egyptian initiative of April 2001, for example, predates the Roadmap by a full year and contains many of the same basic principles contained in it. See also Marwan Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>148</sup> Teresa Whitfield, *Friends Indeed? The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007).

<sup>149</sup> Interview with senior State Department official, June 2010; interview with former UN official, July 2010.

<sup>150</sup> Kofi Annan, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East,” December 11, 2006, available at: <<http://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/651/88/PDF/N0665188.pdf?OpenElement>>.

<sup>151</sup> Teresa Whitfield, “A Crowded Field: Groups of Friends, the United Nations and the Resolution of Conflict,” p. 4.

controversial. In addition to its superpower status, the United States has served as the chief mediator, sponsor, and guarantor of the Middle East peace process throughout most of the last four decades. This role has been central to the Quartet's operation since its inception and one that is readily acknowledged by the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, as its founders would no doubt concede, the Quartet was never intended to replace American leadership in the peace process but to enhance and complement it. As a result, it is virtually impossible to separate the actions or impact of the Quartet as a mechanism from those of its individual members, particularly the United States as the group's undisputed leader.

Yet, while this asymmetry may be unavoidable on some level, it is not without its problems, as already touched upon. As many EU, UN, and Russian officials can attest, the United States is often quite selective in what, and when, it chooses to coordinate with its Quartet partners. This pattern has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout the Quartet's existence—from President Bush's decision to exclude Quartet members from the launching of the Roadmap at the Aqaba Summit in June 2003 to the Obama administration's failure to invite them to the launching of direct negotiations in September 2010. Despite the obvious advantages from a U.S. policy standpoint, this has severely eroded the Quartet's credibility and underscored its inability to deliver tangible changes on the ground.

In the context of the Quartet, American dominance is reflected in more than just its raw power advantage or inordinate sway with the two main parties to the conflict. It is equally a function of the depth

and breadth of U.S. interests with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular and in the broader Middle East in general. Those interests are well known: safeguarding Israel's security, curbing the spread of violent extremism, preventing the spread of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and securing the free-flow of oil from the Gulf, to name only the most prominent of them. The first three of these came into especially sharp focus after the 9/11 attacks, around the time of the Quartet's formation, and against the backdrop of a violent Intifada and U.S. plans for invading Iraq, both of which were subsumed under the U.S.-led "war on terror." The convergence and intensification of these interests led to a shift in U.S. policy and created strong incentives to make use of the Quartet in pursuit of broader regional objectives, even when U.S. goals did not align either with those of the Quartet or of its other three members.

The shift in U.S. priorities occurred just as the Quartet was being formed, beginning in January 2002 with Israel's seizure of the *Karine A*, a ship carrying weapons bound for the Palestinian territories, and culminating in Bush's June 2002 watershed speech of June 2002 laying out his "vision" of Palestinian statehood and Middle East peace. As former Bush national security advisor Stephen Hadley explains:

The president decides fairly early on, after the *Karine A*, that Arafat is a failed leader, who is supporting terror rather than fighting terror. And, at that point, the president says, "I'm done with Arafat. I'm not going to meet with him, I'm not going to deal with him." And in his April 2002 speech,

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<sup>152</sup> American leadership was expressly acknowledged by the Quartet in its first official communiqué: "The UN, EU and Russia express their strong support for Secretary of State Powell's mission, and urge Israel and the Palestinian Authority to cooperate fully with his mission and with their continuing efforts to restore calm and resume a political process." Quartet Statement, April 10, 2002. The point was made somewhat less subtly in a statement by Powell following the May 2, 2002 Quartet meeting: "I expressed my appreciation to my colleagues for the declaration that we produced in Madrid on the 10th of April, and I expressed to them how important it was for me to have this unified body of opinion and thought behind me as I went through the Middle East and continued my work on behalf of President Bush and all of my colleagues represented here to try to move the process forward in the Middle East." Remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, May 2, 2002.

and again in his June 2002 piece, he calls for new leadership that is democratic and that is committed to fighting terror. So, at that point, it's not [about] coordinating demarches to Arafat—we're done with Arafat.<sup>153</sup>

Bush's June 2002 speech marked a decisive shift in U.S. Middle East policy. With the policies of the Bush administration and the Sharon government now in near total alignment, the decades-old conflict between Palestinians and Israelis would no longer be treated as a struggle between two peoples with competing historical and territorial claims but as an extension of the all-encompassing "war on terror."<sup>154</sup> Former national security advisor Sandy Berger summed up the change in U.S. priorities this way: "Every president since at least Nixon has seen the Arab-Israeli conflict as the central strategic issue in the Middle East. But this administration sees Iraq as the central challenge, and ... has disengaged from any serious effort to confront the Arab-Israeli problem."<sup>155</sup>

While the international community applauded Bush's call for a Palestinian state, the first U.S. president to do so officially, his insistence on making Palestinian statehood conditional on having "new leaders, new institutions and new security arrangements with their neighbors" was met with considerable consternation in Europe and much of the international community, and outright anger among Palestinians and throughout the Arab world. The speech also exposed a serious rift within the U.S. administration itself, setting off a fierce battle between the State Department and the White House. Powell and his advisers supported active U.S. en-

gagement in the peace process in concert with its Quartet partners and the region. Key officials at the National Security Council, the vice president's office, and the Pentagon, however, opposed serious attempts at mediation and insisted instead on a U.S. posture that was singularly deferential to Israel's needs and its own assessment of how to handle the situation.

The Israelis, by contrast, enthusiastically welcomed Bush's speech, which they adopted as their new terms of reference for dealing with the Palestinians. The speech demonstrated rather decisively the unprecedented alignment between the U.S. administration and the government of Israel. The strength of U.S.-Israeli ties was not in and of itself unusual, given the longstanding "special relationship" between the two countries, both as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy and a key domestic political issue. But the extent of the Bush administration's identification with the particular policies, aims, and methods of Ariel Sharon—from the preference for unilateralism over negotiations to the conflation of the conflict with the "global war on terror"—far surpassed that of previous administrations. So, while the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia were, on the surface, bound by a common desire to end the conflict, they each had their own motivations for joining the effort that were not necessarily tied to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>156</sup>

For the United States in particular, the Quartet served a number of distinct but overlapping purposes. In addition to allowing for more concerted pressure on the Palestinians and channeling the interventions of what was often considered an unruly

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<sup>153</sup> Stephen Hadley, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>154</sup> In April 2004, a group of sixty retired U.S. foreign service officers sent a letter to President Bush decrying his administration's endorsement of Sharon's hard-line policies. In it, the diplomats wrote: "Your unqualified support of Sharon's extra-judicial assassinations, Israel's Berlin Wall-like barrier, its harsh military measures in occupied territories, and now your endorsement of Sharon's unilateral plan are costing our country its credibility, prestige and friends. Nor is this endorsement even in the best interests of the State of Israel." See "Letter to President Bush from U.S. Diplomats," April 30, 2004, available at: < [http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2004/05/06\\_letter-diplomats\\_print.htm](http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2004/05/06_letter-diplomats_print.htm)>.

<sup>155</sup> Quoted in Robert G. Kaiser "Bush and Sharon Nearly Identical on Mideast Policy," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2003.

<sup>156</sup> Kris Bauman, "The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process," p. 133.

group of international actors, the Quartet proved a useful tool by which to pursue other regional objectives, most notably the March 2003 invasion of Iraq.<sup>157</sup> Internal rivalries within the administration also helped propel U.S. involvement in the Quartet. Specifically, for Powell, the Quartet was a way to try to regain his waning influence, which began shortly after 9/11 and culminated with the decisive “vision” speech of June 2002. According to former deputy national security advisor Elliot Abrams, the June 2002 speech reflected the view of the White House rather than that of the State Department; it was “the first sign ... that Powell has lost control of Middle East policy.”<sup>158</sup> As Abrams goes on to explain:

One of the reasons that Powell liked the Quartet was that it was his.... Whatever the Quartet was in international politics, it was a way for the State Department to assert itself against the White House in internal politics, because the State Department owned the Quartet, from an American point of view.<sup>159</sup>

In other words, the Quartet provided a useful tool within the administration for both Powell, who used it to assert and consolidate his influence, and his rivals, who saw it as a way to bring European and UN policies more in line with those of the United States.

As the most powerful actor in the Quartet and the one with the greatest stake in the conflict, the United States, unlike the other three, has both the ability and the will to undertake decisive unilateral action. Consequently, the Quartet’s role has to a great extent become a function of broader U.S. policy priorities

in the region, including its bilateral relationship with Israel. The implications of this have not been lost on other Quartet members, many of whom note the high degree of coordination between the United States and Israel before, during, and after taking major initiatives, particularly in the early years of the Quartet. This led former Quartet special envoy James Wolfensohn to conclude that real decision-making happens not in the Quartet but between the United States and Israel:

There is a long-standing bilateral relationship between Israel and the United States, which encompasses everything from aid to missiles to financial support to policy planning to everything. And that if you introduce the Quartet, which contains within it three other entities—the Russians, the European Union, and the UN—with whom relations with Israel have been very different—very different ... because you had decades of the U.S. and Israel negotiating the future of the Middle East. And the Quartet to me was an example to try and give some engagement of these other countries, and they took their responsibilities very seriously. I fear that in the end it was the United States that called the shots. I’m not suggesting that they won’t raise the key questions in the two-hour meetings. But in terms of what happens after that, it’s all America directly.<sup>160</sup>

De Soto likewise observes that while “US leadership [of the Quartet] may be inevitable,” there is a distinct downside in that the peace process “has become strategically subservient to US policy in the broader Middle East, including Iraq and Iran....”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> For more on the linkage between the Bush administration’s involvement in the peace process and US plans for invading Iraq, see Marwan Muasher, *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 162–63. See also Mohamed ElBaradei, *The Age of Deception: Nuclear Diplomacy in Treacherous Times* (New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt & Company, 2011), p. 67.

<sup>158</sup> Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> James Wolfensohn, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>161</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” p. 25.

This was by no means exclusive to the Bush administration. Despite prioritizing a resolution of the conflict and a rhetorical commitment to multilateralism, the Obama administration has not placed a premium on acting through the Quartet. Quartet officials often complained about the administration's lack of consultation, particularly in its first year. Although coordination improved somewhat later on, the Obama administration's decision not to invite the other Quartet members to the launching of direct negotiations in September 2010 was a stark reminder that it was not entirely free of unilateralist tendencies. In her remarks at the Washington launch, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressly thanked Egypt and Jordan, as well as Quartet representative Tony Blair, but failed to mention the European Union, the United Nations, Russia, or the Quartet itself.<sup>162</sup> The matter sparked considerable anger among Quartet members, particularly in Europe.<sup>163</sup>

Despite several subsequent attempts to reactive the group, the Quartet remained divided to the point of paralysis throughout most of 2011. Dismayed by the U.S. decision to veto an anti-settlements UN resolution in February 2011 and imbued with a greater sense of urgency amid the growing upheaval in the Arab world, Britain, France, and Germany launched a new initiative that called for a resumption of negotiations “on the basis of clear parameters” covering all core issues.<sup>164</sup> The United States opposed the measure, however, and repeated attempts to push it through the Quartet ahead of

the Palestinians' planned UN bid ended in failure. By the time the group finally met in July, they still could not agree, with U.S. officials refusing to go any further than the language contained in Obama's May 19, 2011 speech.<sup>165</sup>

In hindsight, the sidelining of the other three Quartet members from the Washington talks may have been a blessing in disguise; the process collapsed after only three weeks, following Israel's refusal to extend a partial moratorium on settlement construction in the West Bank. Nevertheless, the episode underscored the nature and extent of America's domination—as distinct from American leadership—of the Quartet; not only did the United States get to decide if, when, and how the group's decisions would be implemented, even determinations of when the Quartet itself was or was not relevant was also left to U.S. discretion. This dynamic has earned the group the unflattering nickname of the “Quartet *sans trois*.”<sup>166</sup> Ironically, it was precisely this desire to be “relevant” on the part of the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia that helped consolidate American dominance of the Quartet.

The European Union, which had its own internal and external reasons for joining the Quartet, may come closest in terms of its influence, but remains a very distant second to the United States. As the largest single donor to the Palestinian Authority and Israel's second largest trading partner (until recently, its largest), the European Union had long

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<sup>162</sup> See Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas,” September 2, 2010, available at: <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/09/146701.htm>>.

<sup>163</sup> The French, in particular, were quite vocal in their criticism of the U.S. decision to exclude the other Quartet members. French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner publicly challenged the EU's new foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, to be more assertive, resulting in a rather terse public exchange between the two senior diplomats. See “Ashton Says Unable to Attend Mideast Peace Talks,” Agence France Presse, August 29, 2010.

<sup>164</sup> “Security Council—The situation in the Middle East—Palestinian Draft Resolution—Joint Statement of the United Kingdom, France and Germany,” February 18, 2011.

<sup>165</sup> For a fascinating account of the reasons behind the failure of the July 15, 2011 Quartet meeting, see Daniel Levy, “America's Attempted Quartet Sophistry,” *Foreign Policy*, July 22, 2011, available at: <[http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/22/palestine\\_israel\\_the\\_un\\_and\\_america\\_s\\_attempted\\_quartet\\_sophistry](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/22/palestine_israel_the_un_and_america_s_attempted_quartet_sophistry)>.

<sup>166</sup> The term apparently was first used by former Arab League secretary general Amre Moussa and later picked up by former EU commissioner for external relations, Chris Patten. See Chris Patten, *Not Quite the Diplomat: Home Truths about World Affairs* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 109.

sought to translate its substantial economic clout into a meaningful political role. With twenty-seven member states and multiple diplomatic and security institutions, however, its ability to do so has been hampered by a lack of internal cohesion. Although the situation has improved somewhat, particularly since the 2009 Lisbon Treaty,<sup>167</sup> Europe remains as divided as ever, as demonstrated throughout the battle over Palestinian statehood in the fall of 2011.<sup>168</sup> European influence was further impaired by Israel's longstanding mistrust of Europe's perceived bias toward the Palestinians. In addition to providing it with a forum through which to check American supremacy and improve its standing with Israel,<sup>169</sup> the Quartet offered the European Union a way to institutionalize its involvement in the peace process and promote internal cohesion "by compelling EU member states to regularly forge a common position."<sup>170</sup>

The United Nations was even more marginal and had even less credibility with Israel than the European Union. UN participation in the Quartet is peculiar in that it is confined to the person of the secretary-general rather than either of its constituent bodies, and its participation is not mandated by either the General Assembly or the Security Council. Its goal, in keeping with the broader UN mission of promoting peace and preventing conflict, is to provide assistance to Palestinians and to support the Middle East peace process. The Quartet provided UN officials with a long-awaited opportunity to play a serious diplomatic role in the

Arab-Israeli peace process. For four decades, the UN role had been confined to maintaining a number of peacekeeping operations in the broader region,<sup>171</sup> providing essential services to the Palestinian people through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other UN agencies, as well as performing other operational matters. According to Teresa Whitfield, "The creation of the [Quartet] by his Personal Representative, Terje Rød-Larsen, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 2001, underlined the importance to [the Secretary-General's] office of strategic partnerships in circumstances in which the UN might otherwise be relegated to a process instrument."<sup>172</sup>

If the "Quartet sans trois" encapsulates America's role within the group, Rød-Larsen's description of it as the combination of U.S. power, EU money, and UN legitimacy accurately sums up Russia's. Apart from having inherited the mantle of the former Soviet Union as an original cosponsor of the peace process, Russia has not played a significant role in the peace process either on the ground or at the negotiating table. The Quartet is for the most part a platform for Russia to enhance its international prestige and manage East-West relations. Although it has had historically close relations with Arab states and the broader Muslim world, and has cultivated closer ties with Israel, Russia's influence with the parties remains limited. Even so, its membership in the Quartet helps enhance its stature in the Middle East and serves as a check on Western,

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<sup>167</sup> Until the Lisbon Treaty, for example, the EU was represented at the Quartet "principals" level by as many as three individuals: (1) the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, (2) the commissioner for external relations, and (3) the foreign minister of the country holding the EU presidency.

<sup>168</sup> The October 31, 2011 vote by members of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to admit Palestine as a full member was highly instructive in this regard. In all, 107 member states voted "yes," 14 voted "no," and 52 abstained. However, EU states were more evenly divided with 11 voting "yes" (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovenia), 5 voting "no" (Czech Republic, Germany, Holland, Lithuania, Sweden), and 11 abstaining (Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Macedonia, United Kingdom).

<sup>169</sup> Costanza Musu, "The Madrid Quartet: An Effective Instrument of Multilateralism?" p. 6.

<sup>170</sup> Costanza Musu, *European Union Policy Towards the Arab-Israeli Peace Process: The Quicksands of Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 79.

<sup>171</sup> In addition to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the UN has also supported other peacekeeping operations in the region, including the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), established following the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Israel and her immediate Arab neighbors, and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), created after the October War of 1973.

<sup>172</sup> Teresa Whitfield, "A Crowded Field: Groups of Friends, the United Nations and the Resolution of Conflict," p. 7.

particularly American, hegemony in the region and on its “monopolization” of the peace process.<sup>173</sup> The Quartet also provides Russia with a source of leverage on a range of regional and international issues, including Iran, arms control, and containing the spread of extremism. That leverage is also enhanced by the fact that it is the only actor within the Quartet capable of talking to all the parties, including Hamas.<sup>174</sup>

Of course, American dominance would not be possible without the parallel tendency of the Quartet’s other three members to acquiesce to the United States—even when serious disagreements existed and when the stakes were inordinately high. This might take the form of relenting to U.S. demands directly or, as was more often the case, through a willingness to accept vague formulations that allowed for the same result. This tendency stems partly from a desire on the part of the three weaker powers to avoid damaging relations with the United States, which could complicate their interests elsewhere, as well as their own often muddled policies, ambivalence, or internal divisions. Whatever its origins, it has seriously undercut the Quartet’s credibility and that of its individual members like the European Union and the United Nations.

This is particularly true of the European Union, as the second most influential actor in the peace process and the one with the most overlapping interests with the United States. Former European Commissioner Chris Patten summed up his critique of the EU role as follows:

It is true that the US has the primary external role in the region, and that any peace settlement will require Israel’s willing

agreement. But none of this justifies the EU’s nervous self-effacement. This removes much of the political price the US should pay when it does nothing or too little. It gives Israel carte blanche. It damages Europe’s relationship with its alleged partners in the Union for the Mediterranean, and makes Europe complicit in outrageous and illegal acts.<sup>175</sup>

Former UN envoy Alvaro de Soto similarly bemoaned UN membership in the Quartet, which he argued only “gives the UN the illusion of having seat at the table” and instead “has become a side show: because it is as much about managing trans-Atlantic relations as anything else....”<sup>176</sup> According to de Soto, UN involvement in the Quartet also has damaged its ability to operate in the area where it has most impact. Because of its association with what are seen as harmful U.S. policies, namely the boycott of the PA and the ensuing blockade on Gaza, the United Nations’ ability to provide humanitarian and development services on the ground has been compromised, which ultimately prompted de Soto to resign from his post in May 2007.<sup>177</sup> As a result, de Soto and others have called on the United Nations to withdraw from the Quartet.

Despite claims by Quartet officials that individual members face no constraints on their freedom of action, the record suggests otherwise. Among the most telling examples was Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s decision to prohibit his personal representative, UN special envoy Alvaro de Soto, from having contact with the Syrian government or the newly elected Hamas government of the PA, basically due to U.S. opposition to both. In his highly contentious “End of Mission” report, de Soto

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<sup>173</sup> Geoffrey Kemp and Paul Saunders, “America, Russia, and the Greater Middle East: Challenges and Opportunities” (The Nixon Center, November 2003), p. 45.

<sup>174</sup> Magen Zvi, “Abu Mazen Visits Russia: New Mediation in the Middle East?” *INSS Insight* 159, February 4, 2010.

<sup>175</sup> Chris Patten, “Time for Real EU Courage,” *The Guardian*, June 11, 2010.

<sup>176</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” p. 32.

<sup>177</sup> Alvaro de Soto, interview with the author, June 2010.



explains the impact this prohibition had on his and the United Nations' credibility:

It almost goes without saying that the impression that both the PA government and that of Syria will have gathered—even though they might tell us the contrary—is not one favourable to their viewing the UN as a trusted interlocutor. I am sure that many UN members, including those in conflict situations needing diplomatic attention, have also formed this impression. It is my experience that, just as managers go to previous supervisors for references before hiring a candidate for a position, parties to conflicts who are considering to whom to resort for impartial good offices will shop around for references from other parties.<sup>178</sup>

Quartet officials flatly reject the “sans trois” characterization, though some do not deny that a problem exists. The problem is largely “self-inflicted,” according to former EU envoy Marc Otte. “The potential leverage is there—it’s just a matter of having the will to use it.”<sup>179</sup> But Otte’s assertion only begs the question. The European Union has always had substantial economic leverage, whether in terms of its substantial trade relations with Israel or its financial assistance to the PA. However, it has been extremely reluctant to employ that leverage for fear of undercutting its improving but still delicate relations with Israel, hastening the collapse of the PA, or both. Such a move would also have angered the United States, potentially complicating transatlantic relations and, perhaps more importantly, threatening the European Union’s continued involvement in the process.

It was not always this way. According to Kris Bauman, “In the early days, the Quartet was neither a nefarious instrumental creation of the United States, nor a mechanism co-opted by the United States to do its bidding. It was a practical multilateral approach to address a superbly complex problem. And it worked.”<sup>180</sup> After Powell’s departure, however, the Quartet began to serve a different purpose. This role was described even more explicitly by a former senior American government official:

The Quartet has a big role for endorsing initiatives taken by the United States. You have to be careful about the Quartet as an independent actor. The reality is that it’s a vehicle for U.S. policy, to allow us to keep everybody—to herd the cats so we’re all heading in the same direction. The Quartet is not really an independent actor.<sup>181</sup>

While most European and UN officials would no doubt take issue with this characterization, their frequent grumblings about U.S. unilateralism and over the United States’ failure to “use the Quartet properly” affirm the essence of the former U.S. official’s assertion. So total has American dominance of the Quartet been, that former UN envoy Alvaro de Soto questioned whether it could even be considered a traditional contact group, in which actors with diverse and disparate interests agree to work jointly toward a common goal, as opposed to a “group of friends,” another type of informal group comprised of like-minded actors assembled to support the efforts of a single leader.<sup>182</sup>

The United States did not invent, or initially even welcome, the Quartet so perhaps it is fitting that it is the only actor with the ability to operate wholly

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<sup>178</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” p. 42.

<sup>179</sup> Marc Otte, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>180</sup> Kris Bauman, “The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process,” p. 147.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with former senior official, July 2010.

<sup>182</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” p. 24.

outside of it. Though there were obvious advantages in having the European Union and the United Nations sign on to its positions, the United States could afford to act on its own when that backing was not there. This was particularly true under the Bush administration but has persisted under the Obama administration as well. The three weaker members by contrast were not in a position to shape the process independently of the United States, not just because they lacked the power and influence of the United States but because doing so also risked freezing them out of the process. Therefore, they had little to lose and much to gain from being part of even an ineffective group, since even “the appearance of making a contribution was almost as relevant as actually doing so.”<sup>183</sup>

Far from leveling the diplomatic playing field as EU, UN, and Russian officials might have hoped, therefore, the Quartet has actually given the United States a *double advantage*, first by virtue of the United States’ inherent power and disproportionate influence with the parties and second through the legitimization of its positions by way of Quartet endorsement. In other words, the power-interests imbalance within the Quartet does more than just reflect the disparity that exists between the United States and the other three members; it actually serves to deepen it. This is the ultimate Achilles’ heel of the Quartet, allowing the United States to act “multilaterally” when it found it useful to do so, namely to gain international buy-in for its policies, and unilaterally when it was not, such as when the goals of the other three diverged from its own. It was this dynamic that led former Quartet special envoy James Wolfensohn to describe the Quartet as little more than a “fig leaf” for U.S. policies, “intended as a sort of cover... It was an attempt to give the patina of international support.”<sup>184</sup>

Wolfensohn’s candor notwithstanding, his assessment of the Quartet is not inconsistent with the views of U.S. officials. A former senior Bush administration official explained the Quartet’s value to the United States as twofold:

One was to get visible international support for our efforts in the Middle East, so that we would be speaking in a context with the EU, the UN, and the Russians. But, also, it was, quite frankly, an effort to corral in one place the interests of a lot of people in participating, so that rather than having a cacophony of voices, you would have one voice, in the form of the Quartet. And of course, the Quartet’s voice would be coordinated with our voice, since we were one of the four and, in large measure, the convener of the Quartet. So, that’s what its purpose was: to both give international support to our efforts, but also to give a focus to the international effort, so the international community was speaking with one voice, not disparate voices and not with competing voices. That’s its purpose. And it largely served that purpose, I think, quite well.<sup>185</sup>

A similar, though slightly more nuanced, view was echoed by an Obama administration official who described the Quartet as “a way to get international support behind a U.S.-led process.” Although the official was quick to add, “But it’s not that simple. Others naturally have a voice and get to contribute in a way that shapes policies; so it’s not purely U.S.-led.”<sup>186</sup>

A parallel dynamic exists between the parties to the conflict. It is no secret that Israel enjoys rather wide latitude in its ability to unilaterally shape developments on the ground, whether through

<sup>183</sup> Teresa Whitfield, “A Crowded Field: Groups of Friends, the United Nations and the Resolution of Conflict,” p. 6.

<sup>184</sup> James Wolfensohn, interview with the author, July 2010. See also James D. Wolfensohn, *A Global Life: My Journey among Rich and Poor, from Sydney to Wall Street to the World Bank* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).

<sup>185</sup> Stephen Hadley, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with administration official, July 2010.

settlement expansion, large-scale military operations, or other measures—irrespective of the Quartet, whose role it had never truly accepted in the first place.<sup>187</sup> The Palestinians, by contrast, have a very limited capacity to act independently, both by virtue of restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation and by their dependence on outside actors for financial, political, and diplomatic support. Thus, whereas the Quartet could impose certain conditions and realities on the Palestinians—for example, the Quartet Principles and the boycott of the PA—the same was not true of Israel. As de Soto explains:

At least since the end of 2005, even though there has developed a generally agreed approach on some aspects of what should be demanded of the Palestinian side, this is not the case as regards Israel. Any grouping that operates on the basis of consensus is at the mercy of the lowest common denominator, and that denominator is defined by the US, which has very serious qualms about exerting pressure on Israel.<sup>188</sup>

Be that as it may, the European Union and the United Nations have had their own qualms about exerting pressure on Israel, since neither has been willing to jeopardize its relations with Israel or its role in the peace process. Ironically, while the Palestinians had been most eager to involve these international actors and were the most welcoming of the Quartet's formation, they have gained the least and were the most constrained by its involvement. On the other hand the two parties that derived the most benefit from the Quartet—the United States and Israel—are also the ones who are the least bound by it.

Many EU and UN officials in particular still cling to the belief that their participation in the Quartet

has had no effect on their individual roles in the peace process, and that they could not have any more influence than they do through the Quartet. Whether EU, UN, and Russian influence over the United States has been greater than American influence over them is certainly debatable. As far as the United States was concerned, however, the answer seemed fairly clear. As Elliot Abrams explains:

If you have an active and interested UN and EU, then you have a problem from the American point of view: what do we do with them? How do we keep them from running off the rails? And the Quartet is a means of “coordination,” which we would view as a means of corralling these people. And it did work. At various moments, while it probably did pull the U.S. a little bit in, let's say, the EU direction, it also pulled them in our direction ... But we got more out of it than anybody else, in my view.

Look at the Russians—here they were at the high table, with the ability to make believe they had influence. There was [Russian foreign minister Sergey] Lavrov with Kofi Annan and Condi. Otherwise, what role would they have played in this? The Europeans played a different role, because they were big donors and big trading partners, and they would've had a larger role, but the way they were set up, with disparate foreign ministers—they didn't have a good mechanism. Solana, good as he was, wasn't able to bring it all together. Solana, for example, didn't control all European foreign aid—the Commission and lots of ministries of individual countries did. So, I think this actually gave the Europeans and Russians more influence than they would have otherwise had. You know, the Israelis hated the

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<sup>187</sup> Daniel Kurtzer, interview with the author, June 2010; Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>188</sup> Alvaro de Soto, “End of Mission Report,” p. 25.

Quartet—refused to meet with the Quartet. Because they felt that it was a diminution of American influence—they thought it was having a bad effect on us, dragging us toward the European position. There was an element of truth to that because we would have to negotiate what the Quartet said.<sup>190</sup>

Israel's worst fears about the Quartet did not materialize. To the contrary, the mechanism ultimately proved quite useful. Israel's former ambassador to the European Union, Oded Eran, recalled his response to the nervous inquiries he received from his superiors in Israel about the Quartet's formation: "I sent a cable from London on this. I told them it's in Israel's interest to have the Quartet because the U.S. will impose its agenda on the Quartet rather than the opposite—I've been proven right."<sup>191</sup>

The Palestinians have taken a rather different view of the Quartet. Following a fairly weak Quartet statement on Israeli settlement activity in February 2011 and in anticipation of a U.S. veto of an anti-settlements resolution in the Security Council later that month, PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi summarized the Palestinians' perception of the Quartet:

On paper, [the Quartet] wields significant diplomatic power given that it is comprised of the United States, the United Nations, Russia and the European Union. In practice, however, it has served as little more than a flimsy excuse for perpetuating

America's monopoly over the beleaguered "peace process." It has also conveniently absolved the United Nations and the European Union from adopting any political initiatives of their own which might be less one-sided than the US approach.<sup>192</sup>

It was this lack of confidence in the Quartet and in American management of the process—with the two now virtually interchangeable—that led Palestinians to shift their approach to the peace process in 2011. The Obama administration's decision to veto the resolution, despite long-standing U.S. opposition to Israeli settlements, highlighted the United States' preoccupation with process-related issues over more substantive aspects of the conflict. It also set the stage for a much greater challenge to the United States and the Quartet in September 2011.

Having despaired of both the process and its sponsors, Abbas again took his case to the United Nations, this time to seek Palestine's admission as a full UN member state. In the run up to the Palestinians' UN bid in September 2011, the Obama administration made clear its intense opposition to the move. Contrary to perception, the measure was not aimed at gaining either statehood or recognition but rather full UN membership as an existing state.<sup>193</sup> The largely symbolic move had more to do with improving the Palestinians' negotiating posture and preserving the feasibility of a two-state solution based on the 1967 lines than with abandoning peace talks altogether.<sup>194</sup> In addition to challenging America's monopoly over the peace

<sup>190</sup> Elliott Abrams, interview with the author, September 2010.

<sup>191</sup> Oded Eran, interview with the author, July 2010.

<sup>192</sup> Hanan Ashrawi, "The Quartet Needs a Qualitative Shift on Palestine," *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2011, available at: <[http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/04/the\\_quartet\\_needs\\_a\\_qualitative\\_shift\\_on\\_palestine](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/04/the_quartet_needs_a_qualitative_shift_on_palestine)>.

<sup>193</sup> The PLO's claim that Palestine is already a state is based on the argument that it has already met the four criteria specified in the Montevideo Convention of 1933, namely a permanent population (Palestinians), a specific territory (West Bank and Gaza Strip, as defined by the June 4, 1967 lines), a government (the PA), and the ability to enter into relations with other countries (through the PLO). See John Quigley, "The Palestine Declaration to the International Criminal Court: The Statehood Issue," *Rutgers Law Record: The Internet Journal of Rutgers School of Law* 35 (Spring 2009), available at: <[http://lawrecord.com/files/36\\_Rutgers\\_L\\_Rec\\_257.pdf](http://lawrecord.com/files/36_Rutgers_L_Rec_257.pdf)>. For more on the rationale behind the Palestinian UN strategy, see Mahmoud Abbas, "The Long Overdue Palestinian State," *New York Times*, May 17, 2011.

<sup>194</sup> See Khaled Elgindy, "Palestine Goes to the UN: Understanding the New Statehood Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2011): pp. 102–13.

process, the move also posed a direct threat to the continued viability of the group itself.

### CONSENSUS FOR ITS OWN SAKE

The Quartet's greatest strength—and the one most frequently cited by those inside it—is its ability to speak to the parties with a single, authoritative voice. The most prominent example of this is the publication of the Roadmap. To be sure, bringing four major global actors with highly disparate interests and perspectives (not to mention internal pressures and differences in opinion) into a consensus on a set of extremely divisive and emotive issues like those underpinning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no simple feat. But the potential benefits of doing so made it well worth the effort. In addition to reducing the possibility of competing interventions, a single mechanism was seen as a way to prevent the parties from engaging in “forum shopping” or play one actor against another. All of this assumed, of course, that the group's members would be genuinely of one mind with regard to the meaning of that consensus, which was seldom the case with the Quartet.

As a result, what should have been the Quartet's greatest asset was instead transformed into a serious liability. Beyond the superficial “vision” articulated in the Roadmap, there is very little common understanding among Quartet members regarding its objectives, means of operation, or overall role in the peace process. Indeed, the group has been deeply divided on nearly every crucial issue it has taken up since its establishment during the difficult days of the al-Aqsa Intifada. Whereas for the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia, the escalating violence of the Intifada made a political resolution all the more urgent, the United States generally

opposed initiating a serious political process aimed at ending the conflict, focusing instead on issues of Palestinian leadership, security, and institutional reform.

In his study of the Quartet, Kris Bauman identifies at least five separate missed opportunities over the course of the Quartet's existence that could have advanced the peace process but that the Quartet failed to seize upon.<sup>195</sup> As Bauman explains:

The most crucial “variable” through all five cases was alignment of mediator goals toward the settlement of the conflict. The goals of the mediators were not aligned. Instead, the goal of one of the mediators, the US, was aligned with the goal of one of the conflicting parties, Israel. This was multiparty mediation failure at its worst. The strengths and weaknesses of multiparty mediation were no longer relevant. No potential precipitant events were sought, no departures in process were contemplated, and no turning points in the peace process resulted.<sup>196</sup>

While any group operating on the basis of consensus will necessarily be constrained by the lowest common denominator, it is equally true that the credibility and effectiveness of the group will invariably be determined by the extent to which that consensus reflects a genuine common understanding and the degree to which its members, individually or collectively, live up to the terms of their message.

Although deep divisions were present in the Quartet from the very start, nowhere was the lack of alignment among its members more evident—or more damaging—than in the cases of the Roadmap and

<sup>195</sup> Bauman calls these five opportunities “potential precipitant events,” which include: (1) the death of Yasser Arafat (November 2004), (2) Israel's withdrawal from Gaza (Fall 2005), (3) Ariel Sharon's incapacitation (January 2006), (4) Hamas's election victory (January 2006), and (5) the Mecca Agreement (February 2007).

<sup>196</sup> Kris Bauman, “The Middle East Quartet of Mediators: Understanding Multiparty Mediation in the Middle East Peace Process” p. 206.

the Quartet Principles, and in the disparate treatment of the two. Whereas the Quartet allowed implementation of Roadmap to fall by the wayside, it has held scrupulously to the letter of the Quartet Principles.<sup>197</sup> And although only the former was officially enshrined in a Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1515), it was the latter that assumed quasi-legal status.<sup>198</sup> In both cases, a consensus was negotiated among all four actors and established as official Quartet policy. And yet, in both cases, differences in how Quartet members understood that consensus were substantial enough that they nearly caused the breakup of the group. In the case of the Roadmap, disagreements over the lack of implementation were papered over and eventually overtaken by a new “consensus” around the need to rally behind Israel’s planned withdrawal from Gaza. When it came to the far more formidable divisions over the Quartet Principles, however, the lack of genuine consensus was simply subordinated to the desire to maintain unity at all costs. Indeed, since the split between Hamas and Fatah and the siege of Gaza in the summer of 2007, both outgrowths in no small measure of the Quartet Principles, the Quartet has become increasingly inactive, if not irrelevant.

As Teresa Whitfield points out, members of any informal group “must hold the settlement of the conflict as their highest goal.”<sup>199</sup> However, as we have seen, Quartet members often placed their own interests above those of the common goal. The perpetual quest for “consensus”—combined with the need of the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia to be at the table—has led to an equally compelling desire to maintain the unity of the Quartet at all costs, even in the face of serious internal

divisions and irrespective of its impact or effectiveness. The problem is not that differences in opinion among Quartet members exist or that they would have conflicting interpretations over some decision or another—these are to be expected in any group—but that whatever nominal consensus may exist at a given moment has been then used to paper over much deeper and more consequential divisions. So while the Quartet could pride itself on its ability to speak with “one voice,” this meant little if its members did not agree on what that voice was saying or if their words bore no resemblance to their actions.

A point that Quartet officials have generally failed to appreciate is that such hollow, and in some cases illusory, consensus were often more harmful than not reaching a consensus at all. In reality, therefore, collective action by the Quartet has often been less effective—and in some cases, more harmful—than had individual members acted on their own. For the Quartet, reaching a consensus—however fleeting, superficial, or imaginary it may be—has outstripped the goal of advancing the interests of a peaceful settlement between Israelis and Palestinians; instead the goal became consensus for its own sake. The International Crisis Group’s Gareth Evans’s observation regarding the European Union’s own lack of consensus applies equally to the Quartet: “Maybe speaking with a divided voice is better than speaking with one voice and getting it wrong.”<sup>200</sup>

This point was underscored by the 2011 Palestinian bid for UN membership, which forced U.S., EU, UN, and Russian officials to reevaluate the meaning—and value—of genuine consensus.

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<sup>197</sup> Further adding to the discrepancy in their treatment by the Quartet, the requirements of the Roadmap, unlike the Quartet Principles, were officially adopted by the Security Council in UNSCR 1515, thereby giving it even greater legal authority.

<sup>198</sup> UNSC Resolution 1850 (December 16, 2008) referred to the Quartet Principles but did not endorse them per se. Among other things, the resolution calls on members states “to support the Palestinian government that is committed to the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and respects the commitments of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.”

<sup>199</sup> Teresa Whitfield, *Working with Groups of Friends*, p. 9.

<sup>200</sup> Gareth Evans, “Towards Peace in the Middle East: Lessons for European Policymakers,” Address by the president of the International Crisis Group to the closing session of the PSE/Socialist Group in the European Parliament Conference on Moving Toward an International Peace Conference for the Middle East, July 3, 2007, available at: <<http://www.gevans.org/speeches/speech229.html>>.

Despite months of deep divisions across the Atlantic and within the European Union, the lack of consensus has not produced the kind of apocalyptic outcomes that Quartet enthusiasts in the EU and elsewhere had always feared. More important, the flurry of diplomatic activity before and after the UN bid laid bare the myth that the Quartet enhances rather than dilutes EU and UN influence in the peace process. Throughout the affair, Europe emerged as the crucial battleground in the diplomatic contest between those who support Palestinian UN membership and those who oppose it. This gave the EU and key European actors like France unprecedented prominence and leverage, far more than the Quartet has offered them. The fact that it was all happening at the United Nations elevated the organization's prominence at the expense of the Quartet's.

Somewhat counterintuitively, the Palestinian move suggests that there may actually be strength in *disunity*; the absence of a unified stance may yet free American, European, and other international actors from the failed formulas of the past and lead to a more honest debate over how to proceed and create new opportunities for moving forward. At the same time, it all but formalized the Quartet's obsolescence by simultaneously challenging its two most sacred pillars: that only the United States could lead the peace process and that the Quartet was the only ac-

ceptable international forum in which to pursue it. If the Quartet's greatest strength was its ability to marshal the collective resources of its members and speak with one authoritative voice, its principal weaknesses was its tendency to be all things to all people. While this may have been a major asset for its members, it was of little benefit to the process itself. The malleability of the Quartet enabled its most powerful and vested member, the United States, to dominate the mechanism so completely as to effectively transform it in virtually every way. Thus, what was once conceived as a multilateral framework for resolving the conflict has now become little more than a tool of American foreign policy.

Likewise, the original understanding of the Quartet as a vehicle for mediating between *two* parties has been replaced by one focused primarily on managing (and often micromanaging) the affairs of one of them—the Palestinians. Lastly, the Quartet underwent a parallel shift from what was initially a more strategic, comprehensive and integrated vision aimed at conflict resolution to one that is decidedly reactive and disjointed, even in its attempts at conflict management. Ironically, by habitually acquiescing in this arrangement, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia were to a great extent complicit in their own marginalization as well as in setting back prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

## CONCLUSION

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A decade after its formation, the Quartet has little to show for its involvement in a peace process that has itself gone on for two decades. While it would be naïve to expect the Quartet to bring about an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the question was never whether the Quartet lived up to its many lofty commitments, but whether the peace process as a whole (including the parties themselves) has benefited from its involvement.

Had it only been a matter of its failure to implement the Roadmap or prevent outbursts of violence, one might have considered the Quartet a diplomatic and political wash no different than many groups of its kind. While the Quartet Principles in and of themselves may not have been unreasonable, the manner in which they were used and continue to be upheld has exacted an inordinately high cost in diplomatic, political, and humanitarian terms that far exceed any supposed benefits to the peace process. As the only one of its decisions ever to be seriously implemented, the Quartet Principles have helped lay the foundations for the ongoing blockade of Gaza and the persistent split within the Palestinian Authority. The ensuing erosion of the Palestinian leadership's domestic legitimacy has made any resumption of a credible negotiations process all but impossible.

In the end, the Quartet did not work because it *could* not work. The group's highly malleable structure and

lopsided membership greatly hindered its ability to operate as an independent actor. Though these structural constraints were not the primary cause of the mechanism's ineffectiveness, they provided an enabling environment for a far more damaging and entirely self-inflicted defect: the willingness of its members to paper over genuine and often far-reaching disagreements in the interest of maintaining group cohesion. Since being in the Quartet served members' own interests, these illusory and even bogus "consensuses" were often arrived at without sufficient consideration for their deeper implications for the process and the parties. This was especially true for the Palestinians, who were least able to act independently of the mechanism—and why they became the first to break free of it in September 2011.

The Quartet did enjoy some relative success during its first two years (October 2001-April 2003). This was mainly because its goals were limited to ending the Israeli-Palestinian violence that existed at the time and coaxing the United States out of its self-imposed disengagement, of which it succeeded only in the latter. The Quartet's only real success therefore has been in ensuring American engagement in the peace process. But the Quartet did more than just affirm American leadership, it allowed the United States to monopolize virtually all major aspects of the process by giving U.S. political positions far more weight and legitimacy



than they could otherwise have had. In exchange for institutionalizing U.S. dominance, the other three members were awarded their own permanent seats at the table. But even this has proved illusory, since the Quartet has actually diminished EU, UN, and Russian influence by downgrading the value of their individual positions in comparison to those of the Quartet.

The fact that the Quartet benefitted its members, however, did not make it any more valuable to the parties or the peace process. That the conditions that led to the Quartet's formation no longer exist only highlights the extent to which it has outlived its utility. Whatever benefits the Quartet may have brought to the peace process in 2001 or even 2006 no longer applied to the realities of 2011. Like the peace process itself, the Quartet is politically adrift, anachronistic, and lacking in strategic purpose or direction.

The Quartet's greatest sin was not that it failed to achieve what it set out to accomplish but that it insisted on maintaining the pretense that it ever would or even could. In the end, no consensus would have been better than a fake consensus, just as an overtly U.S.-dominated process would have been preferable to a phony multilateral one. While inconsistencies and even a certain amount of diplomatic double-speak are to be expected, the Quartet's contradictions are simply too numerous and the gaps between its words and deeds too great for it to be a credible actor. In the process of becoming all things to all people, the Quartet has ceased to be anything at all.

## BEYOND THE QUARTET

For all the reasons outlined above, the current mechanism is too outdated, ineffective, and discredited to be reformed. Rather than undertaking another vain attempt to "reactivate" the Quartet,

the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia should simply allow the existing mechanism to go quietly into the night. In the short term, this will require the office of the Quartet representative be dissolved and its mission folded into the existing donor/aid structure. More important, however, it will require the United States and its international partners, both inside and outside the region, to work together to forge a new international consensus around the requirements for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace between Palestinians and Israelis and to devise a new peace process "architecture" that is more coherent and strategic in its approach, more equitable in its dealings with the parties, and more balanced in its composition than the current arrangement.

While American leadership remains essential to the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace, given the record of past failures and America's declining influence in the region overall, it may no longer be possible—or even desirable—for the United States to maintain exclusive control over the process. This will require broadening the circle of actors beyond the narrow confines of the four Quartet members to include key regional actors and others relevant stakeholders. One possible way forward would be to convene an international peace conference (modeled on the 1991 Madrid Conference), perhaps during the first half of 2012, bringing together its former Quartet partners, key regional allies (particularly Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and possibly others like Qatar and Morocco), along with other relevant stakeholders (i.e., Norway, Turkey, World Bank, etc.). Whatever the precise configuration may be, any new initiative by the United States should entail adopting a genuinely multilateral approach, including the participation of key regional actors and others relevant stakeholders, and a return to a focus on political negotiations aimed at ending rather than managing the conflict.

## APPENDIX I - QUARTET IMPACT AND RELEVANCE IN VARIOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION & CRISIS MANAGEMENT SITUATIONS

	IMPACT			RELEVANCE		
	Stated Objective	Achieved?	Actual Outcome	Official Role	Achieved?	Actual Role
<b>Intifada / Violence</b> <i>(2001–05)</i>	Ceasefire	No	Unilateral Ceasefire by Palestinians	None	N/A	None
<b>Roadmap</b> <i>(Apr. 2003)</i>	Security/Reform; Settlement Freeze; PS Negotiations	No	Not Implemented	Sponsor; Monitor Implementation	Minimal	Sponsor
<b>Disengagement /AMA</b> <i>(Fall 2005)</i>	Coordination; Smooth transfer; Economic revival	Partly	Coordinated; Gaza sealed / no AMA	Support Isr-Pal. Coordination & Negotiations	Partly	Mainly QSE
<b> Hamas Elections</b> <i>(Jan. 2006)</i>	Elections on time; Endorsed Hamas participation	Yes	Election “free & fair”; Boycott of PA	Quartet Principles	Yes	Boycott of PA
<b>Annapolis Negotiations</b> <i>(Nov. 2007–Dec. 2008)</i>	PS Agreement by Jan. 2009	No	Talks ended by Gaza War	None	N/A	None
<b>Gaza War (Cast Lead)</b> <i>(Dec. 2008–Jan. 2009)</i>	None	N/A	UN-brokered Ceasefire	None	N/A	None
<b>Gaza Blockade</b> <i>(Jun. 2007–present)</i>	End Blockade	No	Blockade eased (after flotilla)	Coordination	Yes	OQR, UN, U.S.
<b>Proximity Talks</b> <i>(May–Aug. 2010)</i>	Direct Negotiations; PS deal in 2 yrs	Partly	Moved to direct negotiations	None	N/A	None (U.S. Only)
<b>Direct Negotiations</b> <i>(Sep. 2010)</i>	PS Agreement by Aug. 2011	No	Collapsed after 3 wks (after moratorium)	None	N/A	None (Not Invited)

PS = Permanent Status    OQR = Office of Quartet Rep.    QSE = Quartet Special Envoy

## APPENDIX II - PERFORMANCE-BASED ROADMAP TO A PERMANENT TWO-STATE SOLUTION TO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

(April 30, 2003)

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The following is a performance-based and goal-driven roadmap, with clear phases, timelines, target dates, and benchmarks aiming at progress through reciprocal steps by the two parties in the political, security, economic, humanitarian, and institution-building fields, under the auspices of the Quartet [the United States, European Union, United Nations, and Russia]. The destination is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict by 2005, as presented in President Bush's speech of 24 June, and welcomed by the EU, Russia and the UN in the 16 July and 17 September Quartet Ministerial statements.

A two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only be achieved through an end to violence and terrorism, when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror and willing and able to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty, and through Israel's readiness to do what is necessary for a democratic Palestinian state to be established, and a clear, unambiguous acceptance by both parties of the goal of a negotiated settlement as described below. The Quartet will assist and facilitate implementation of the plan, starting in Phase I, including direct discussions between the parties as required. The plan establishes a realistic timeline for implementation. However, as a performance-based plan, progress will require and depend upon the good faith efforts of the parties, and their compliance with each of the obligations outlined below. Should the parties perform their obligations rapidly, progress within and through the phases may come sooner than indicated in the plan. Non-compliance with obligations will impede progress.

A settlement, negotiated between the parties, will result in the emergence of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbors. The settlement will resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and end the occupation that began in 1967, based on the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, UNSCRs 242, 338 and 1397, agreements previously reached by the parties, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah—endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit—calling for acceptance of Israel as a neighbor living in peace and security, in the context of a comprehensive settlement. This initiative is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

The Quartet will meet regularly at senior levels to evaluate the parties' performance on implementation of the plan. In each phase, the parties are expected to perform their obligations in parallel, unless otherwise indicated.

### ***Phase I: Ending Terror And Violence, Normalizing Palestinian Life, and Building Palestinian Institutions – Present to May 2003***

In Phase I, the Palestinians immediately undertake an unconditional cessation of violence according to the steps outlined below; such action should be accompanied by supportive measures undertaken by Israel. Palestinians and Israelis resume security cooperation based on the Tenet work plan to end violence, terrorism, and incitement through restructured and

effective Palestinian security services. Palestinians undertake comprehensive political reform in preparation for statehood, including drafting a Palestinian constitution, and free, fair and open elections upon the basis of those measures. Israel takes all necessary steps to help normalize Palestinian life. Israel withdraws from Palestinian areas occupied from September 28, 2000 and the two sides restore the status quo that existed at that time, as security performance and cooperation progress. Israel also freezes all settlement activity, consistent with the Mitchell report.

### **At the outset of Phase I:**

Palestinian leadership issues unequivocal statement reiterating Israel's right to exist in peace and security and calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere. All official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel.

Israeli leadership issues unequivocal statement affirming its commitment to the two-state vision of an independent, viable, sovereign Palestinian state living in peace and security alongside Israel, as expressed by President Bush, and calling for an immediate end to violence against Palestinians everywhere. All official Israeli institutions end incitement against Palestinians.

### *Security*

Palestinians declare an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism and undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt, and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere.

Rebuilt and refocused Palestinian Authority security apparatus begins sustained, targeted, and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. This includes commencing confiscation of illegal weapons and

consolidation of security authority, free of association with terror and corruption.

GOI takes no actions undermining trust, including deportations, attacks on civilians; confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property, as a punitive measure or to facilitate Israeli construction; destruction of Palestinian institutions and infrastructure; and other measures specified in the Tenet work plan.

Relying on existing mechanisms and on-the-ground resources, Quartet representatives begin informal monitoring and consult with the parties on establishment of a formal monitoring mechanism and its implementation.

Implementation, as previously agreed, of U.S. rebuilding, training and resumed security cooperation plan in collaboration with outside oversight board (U.S.–Egypt–Jordan). Quartet support for efforts to achieve a lasting, comprehensive cease-fire.

All Palestinian security organizations are consolidated into three services reporting to an empowered Interior Minister.

Restructured/retrained Palestinian security forces and IDF counterparts progressively resume security cooperation and other undertakings in implementation of the Tenet work plan, including regular senior-level meetings, with the participation of U.S. security officials.

Arab states cut off public and private funding and all other forms of support for groups supporting and engaging in violence and terror.

All donors providing budgetary support for the Palestinians channel these funds through the Palestinian Ministry of Finance's Single Treasury Account.

As comprehensive security performance moves forward, IDF withdraws progressively from areas

occupied since September 28, 2000 and the two sides restore the status quo that existed prior to September 28, 2000. Palestinian security forces re-deploy to areas vacated by IDF.

### *Palestinian Institution-Building*

Immediate action on credible process to produce draft constitution for Palestinian statehood. As rapidly as possible, constitutional committee circulates draft Palestinian constitution, based on strong parliamentary democracy and cabinet with empowered prime minister, for public comment/debate. Constitutional committee proposes draft document for submission after elections for approval by appropriate Palestinian institutions.

Appointment of interim prime minister or cabinet with empowered executive authority/decision-making body.

GOI fully facilitates travel of Palestinian officials for PLC and Cabinet sessions, internationally supervised security retraining, electoral and other reform activity, and other supportive measures related to the reform efforts.

Continued appointment of Palestinian ministers empowered to undertake fundamental reform. Completion of further steps to achieve genuine separation of powers, including any necessary Palestinian legal reforms for this purpose.

Establishment of independent Palestinian election commission. PLC reviews and revises election law.

Palestinian performance on judicial, administrative, and economic benchmarks, as established by the International Task Force on Palestinian Reform.

As early as possible, and based upon the above measures and in the context of open debate and transparent candidate selection/electoral campaign based on a free, multi-party process, Palestinians hold free, open, and fair elections.

GOI facilitates Task Force election assistance, registration of voters, movement of candidates and voting officials. Support for NGOs involved in the election process.

GOI reopens Palestinian Chamber of Commerce and other closed Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem based on a commitment that these institutions operate strictly in accordance with prior agreements between the parties.

### *Humanitarian Response*

Israel takes measures to improve the humanitarian situation. Israel and Palestinians implement in full all recommendations of the Bertini report to improve humanitarian conditions, lifting curfews and easing restrictions on movement of persons and goods, and allowing full, safe, and unfettered access of international and humanitarian personnel.

AHLC reviews the humanitarian situation and prospects for economic development in the West Bank and Gaza and launches a major donor assistance effort, including to the reform effort.

GOI and PA continue revenue clearance process and transfer of funds, including arrears, in accordance with agreed, transparent monitoring mechanism.

### *Civil Society*

Continued donor support, including increased funding through PVOs/NGOs, for people to people programs, private sector development and civil society initiatives.

### *Settlements*

GOI immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001.

Consistent with the Mitchell Report, GOI freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements).

***Phase II: Transition – June 2003-December 2003***

In the second phase, efforts are focused on the option of creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty, based on the new constitution, as a way station to a permanent status settlement. As has been noted, this goal can be achieved when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror, willing and able to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty. With such a leadership, reformed civil institutions and security structures, the Palestinians will have the active support of the Quartet and the broader international community in establishing an independent, viable, state.

Progress into Phase II will be based upon the consensus judgment of the Quartet of whether conditions are appropriate to proceed, taking into account performance of both parties. Furthering and sustaining efforts to normalize Palestinian lives and build Palestinian institutions, Phase II starts after Palestinian elections and ends with possible creation of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders in 2003. Its primary goals are continued comprehensive security performance and effective security cooperation, continued normalization of Palestinian life and institution-building, further building on and sustaining of the goals outlined in Phase I, ratification of a democratic Palestinian constitution, formal establishment of office of prime minister, consolidation of political reform, and the creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders.

International Conference: Convened by the Quartet, in consultation with the parties, immediately after the successful conclusion of Palestinian elections, to support Palestinian economic recovery and launch a process, leading to establishment of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders.

Such a meeting would be inclusive, based on the goal of a comprehensive Middle East peace (including between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon), and based on the principles described in the preamble to this document.

Arab states restore pre-intifada links to Israel (trade offices, etc.).

Revival of multilateral engagement on issues including regional water resources, environment, economic development, refugees, and arms control issues.

New constitution for democratic, independent Palestinian state is finalized and approved by appropriate Palestinian institutions. Further elections, if required, should follow approval of the new constitution.

Empowered reform cabinet with office of prime minister formally established, consistent with draft constitution.

Continued comprehensive security performance, including effective security cooperation on the bases laid out in Phase I.

Creation of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders through a process of Israeli-Palestinian engagement, launched by the international conference. As part of this process, implementation of prior agreements, to enhance maximum territorial contiguity, including further action on settlements in conjunction with establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders.

Enhanced international role in monitoring transition, with the active, sustained, and operational support of the Quartet.

Quartet members promote international recognition of Palestinian state, including possible UN membership.

***Phase III: Permanent Status Agreement and End of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict – 2004-2005***

Progress into Phase III, based on consensus judgment of Quartet, and taking into account actions of both parties and Quartet monitoring. Phase III objectives are consolidation of reform and stabilization of Palestinian institutions, sustained, effective Palestinian security performance, and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at a permanent status agreement in 2005.

Second International Conference: Convened by Quartet, in consultation with the parties, at beginning of 2004 to endorse agreement reached on an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and formally to launch a process with the active, sustained, and operational support of the Quartet, leading to a final, permanent status resolution in 2005, including on borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements; and, to support progress toward a comprehensive Middle East settlement between Israel and Lebanon and Israel and Syria, to be achieved as soon as possible.

Continued comprehensive, effective progress on the reform agenda laid out by the Task Force in preparation for final status agreement.

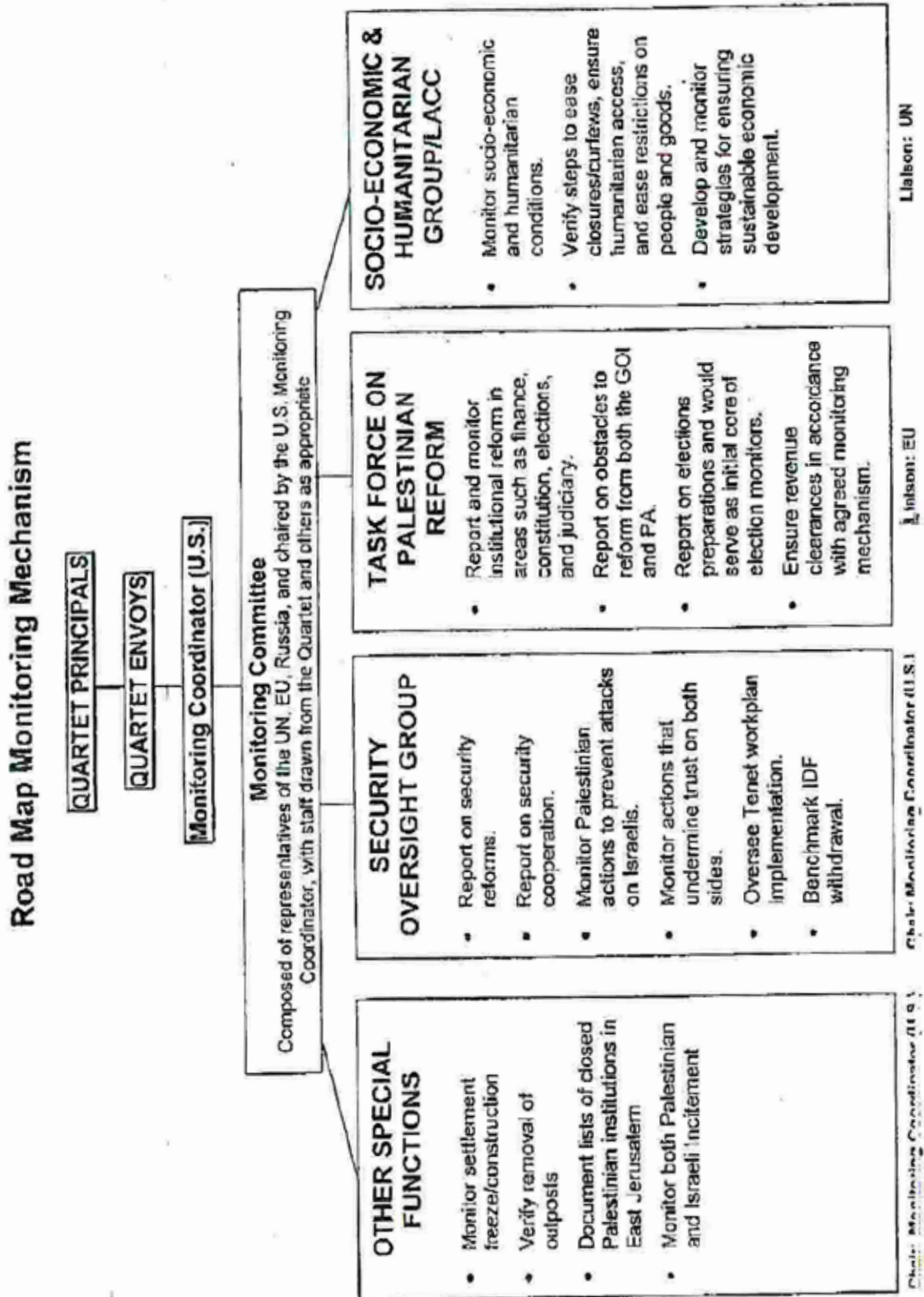
Continued sustained and effective security performance, and sustained, effective security cooperation on the bases laid out in Phase I.

International efforts to facilitate reform and stabilize Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian economy, in preparation for final status agreement.

Parties reach final and comprehensive permanent status agreement that ends the Israel-Palestinian conflict in 2005, through a settlement negotiated between the parties based on UNSCR 242, 338, and 1397, that ends the occupation that began in 1967, and includes an agreed, just, fair, and realistic solution to the refugee issue, and a negotiated resolution on the status of Jerusalem that takes into account the political and religious concerns of both sides, and protects the religious interests of Jews, Christians, and Muslims worldwide, and fulfills the vision of two states, Israel and sovereign, independent, democratic and viable Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security.

Arab state acceptance of full normal relations with Israel and security for all the states of the region in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

# APPENDIX III - ROAD MAP MONITORING MECHANISM





## MONITORING MECHANISM FOR THE QUARTET ROAD MAP

### 1. OBJECTIVE

Two years of crisis underscore the need for a third party role in facilitating Israeli and Palestinian efforts to resolve their conflict. To this end, the Quartet is putting forward a *road map* and a mechanism for its implementation. The structure of that mechanism is the subject of this note. The *Quartet's* monitoring role is fundamental to implementation of – and progress along – the *road map*. Equally essential is the *Quartet's* active assistance and facilitation of the provisions laid out in the *road map*. To be credible, these two roles must be performed on the ground, by a specific structure set up by the *Quartet*, under a single administration. As a practical matter, this structure may take on its role gradually. Recognizing the scope of what has to be monitored in Phase One of the Roadmap, the Quartet may draw upon additional in-country experts and relevant organizations for advice and assistance in addition to the core structure outlined below.

### 2. CREATING A MONITORING COMMITTEE

A Monitoring Committee will be created to monitor implementation of the *road map* by the parties and by the international community. The Monitoring Committee will:

- Work with the Quartet and the four specialized groups, in consultation with the parties, to develop agreed benchmarks against the Roadmap provisions.
- Verify the achievements of the parties in implementing the *road map*, according to agreed benchmarks.
  - Verify the implementation of the security measures laid out in phase I of the *road map*, namely: the cease-fire, anti-incitement, and anti-terrorist measures taken by the Palestinian authority, Israeli military redeployments, etc.
  - Monitor the reform of the Palestinian security services.
  - Monitor Palestinian institution-building, including work on a democratic Palestinian constitution.
  - Monitor preparations for and observation of the electoral process.
  - Monitor the reform of the Palestinian Authority's finances.
  - Verify the dismantlement of settlement outposts erected since March 2001, and freeze on settlement activity.
- On the basis of verification – according to agreed benchmarks – of the above measures, evaluate the respective performances of the two parties, and offer a recommendation to the appropriate political level of the Quartet on whether it would be appropriate to move on to subsequent phases of the *road map*.
- Work with the Parties, as appropriate, to resolve, at the technical and policy levels, problems encountered in implementing the *road map*.

### 3. STRUCTURES

#### The Monitoring Committee

- Will be chaired by a U.S. Coordinator, and will work with Quartet representatives, drawn from the Quartet and others as appropriate, and with representatives of the two parties to verify whether the parties are respecting their commitments.
- Will regularly draft reports to be forwarded confidentially to the *Quartet* of special envoys.
- Will refer matters to the *Quartet* of special envoys whenever it judges this to be necessary.
- Will be responsible for a budget, necessary to carry out its mission, and allocated to it by the Quartet, with expenses shared equally.
- Will attempt to resolve the problems it encounters in carrying out its mission, and those reported to it by the specialized groups. To this end, it may request the intervention of the *Quartet* of special envoys.
- Will set up its headquarters in Jerusalem.

#### Specialized Groups

- Four specialized groups will work under the supervision of the Monitoring Committee: to assist, facilitate and drive implementation of the *road map*, in the knowledge that effective implementation will be the responsibility of each of the two parties.
- Specialized Groups will report directly to the Monitoring Committee and Monitoring Coordinator for this purpose.
- The Coordinator will help direct the efforts of the International community through existing relevant bodies (AHLC, Task Force on Palestinian reforms, Working/Support groups, etc).
- The specialized groups will consist of:

**Security Oversight Group:** Chaired by the U.S. Monitoring Coordinator, and composed of representatives from the UN, EU, Russia, Egypt, and Jordan specifically appointed for those tasks (teams already on the spot, and reinforcements and support from other members of the *Quartet*).

**Task Force on Palestinian Reform:** composed of the existing Task force for Palestinian reforms, the reform support groups, and other existing bodies already operating in this domain. An EU representative will serve as liaison between the monitoring committee and the Reform Support Group coordinators.

**Socioeconomic and Humanitarian Group/LACC:** composed of the existing members of the Local Aid Coordination Committee (LACC) and sub-groups such as the Humanitarian and Emergency Policy Group (HEPG), the Task Force on Project

Implementation (TFPI), and others as appropriate. A UN representative will serve as liaison between the monitoring committee and the LACC co-chair secretariat.

**Other Special Functions Group:** chaired by the Monitoring Coordinator, composed of the consular and diplomatic teams from Quartet missions.

#### The Quartet of Special Envoys

- With the approval of the *Quartet* at ministerial level, will appoint the members and the Monitoring Coordinator. The Coordinator will be appointed on a permanent basis.
- In light of the reports of the Coordinator, will evaluate progress in implementing the provisions of the *road map*. It will inform the ministerial *Quartet* of its assessment of the progress achieved, either in light of the reports of the coordinator of both the monitoring and support committees, or on its own initiative.
- Will decide to publish, on a case by case basis, the reports received from the monitoring committee.
- Will attempt to resolve disputes or problems referred to it by the Coordinator. If there is a serious difficulty, it will refer matters to the Quartet ministerial.
- May invite to its meetings representatives of countries or organizations whose involvement in implementing the *road map* it considers to be indispensable.

#### The Quartet at Ministerial Level

- Will meet as the situation demands, to take stock of the implementation of the *road map* on the basis of the reports sent to it by the *Quartet* of special envoys.
- Will assess the progress achieved by both parties.
- Will address itself directly to the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and, if necessary, to other leaders inside or outside the region, to attempt to resolve the difficulties or disputes encountered on the ground in implementing the measures laid out in the *road map*. If it judges this to be useful, it may occasionally delegate this responsibility to the *Quartet* envoys.

#### 4. RELATIONS WITH THE PARTIES

Both parties must clearly accept the principle of the monitoring mechanism, endorse its working methods, and commit to full cooperation, facilitation, and disclosure. The parties will appoint liaison officers to the monitoring committee. Additionally, the parties will ensure full coordination with each of the specialized groups at all relevant operational levels. The parties undertake to provide the necessary permits for the members of the monitoring committee and of the specialized groups to travel between Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and within the Territories. Freedom of movement for the members of the committees is essential to their operations. To that end, a memorandum of understanding, covering issues such as working methods, permits, access, security etc. will be signed by the parties.

## APPENDIX IV - QUARTET STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST (QUARTET PRINCIPLES)

JANUARY 30, 2006

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Representatives of the Quartet—U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, High Representative for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner—met today in London to discuss the situation in the Middle East.

The Quartet congratulated the Palestinian people on an electoral process that was free, fair and secure. The Quartet believes that the Palestinian people have the right to expect that a new government will address their aspirations for peace and statehood, and it welcomed President Abbas' affirmation that the Palestinian Authority is committed to the Roadmap, previous agreements and obligations between the parties, and a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is the view of the Quartet that all members of a future Palestinian government must be committed to nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap. We urge both parties to respect their existing agreements, including on movement and access.

The Quartet received updates from Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn and U.S. Security Coordinator LTG Keith Dayton at today's meeting. The Quartet called on the Palestinian Authority to ensure law and order, prevent terrorist attacks and dismantle the infrastructure of terror. The Quartet acknowledged the positive role of the Palestinian Authority security forces in helping maintain order during the recent elections. It expressed its view that progress on further consolidation, accountability and reform remains an important task.

Mindful of the needs of the Palestinian people, the Quartet discussed the issue of assistance to the

Palestinian Authority. First, the Quartet expressed its concern over the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority and urged measures to facilitate the work of the caretaker government to stabilize public finances, taking into consideration established fiscal accountability and reform benchmarks. Second, the Quartet concluded that it was inevitable that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap.

The Quartet calls upon the newly elected PLC to support the formation of a government committed to these principles as well as the rule of law, tolerance, reform and sound fiscal management.

Both parties are reminded of their obligations under the Roadmap to avoid unilateral actions which prejudice final status issues. The Quartet reiterated its view that settlement expansion must stop, reiterated its concern regarding the route of the barrier, and noted Acting Prime Minister Olmert's recent statements that Israel will continue the process of removing unauthorized outposts.

The Quartet expressed its concern for the health of Prime Minister Sharon and its hope for his rapid recovery.

The Quartet reiterated its commitment to the principles outlined in the Roadmap and previous statements, and reaffirmed its commitment to a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict based upon U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The Quartet will remain seized of the matter and will engage key regional actors.

## THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

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The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Vice President of Foreign Policy at Brookings, was the founding Director of the Saban Center. Kenneth M. Pollack is the center's Director. Within the Saban Center is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers.

They include Daniel Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University, who is the center's Director of Research; Bruce Riedel, a specialist on counterterrorism, who served as a senior advisor to four presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council and during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Salman Shaikh, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Ibrahim Sharqieh, Fellow and Deputy Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shadi Hamid, Fellow and Director of Research of the Brookings Doha Center; and Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings.

The Saban Center is undertaking path breaking research in five areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Gulf security; the dynamics of Iranian domestic politics and the threat of nuclear proliferation; mechanisms and requirements for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for the war against terrorism, including the continuing challenge of state sponsorship of terrorism; and political and economic change in the Arab world, and the methods required to promote democratization.

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