120 buildings outside the borders of Area B.
The Regional Opportunity

The threats posed by the Syrian Civil War, ISIS, and Iran’s regional influence have created an unprecedented alignment of interests between Israel and key Arab states. It would be a mistake to assume these mutual interests will remain in place indefinitely.

Already, Egypt and Jordan enjoy high levels of security and intelligence cooperation and coordination with Israel as a result of their respective peace treaties and shared border concerns. Egypt and Jordan have an interest in further deepening their close cooperation with Israel, but each must also respond to public sentiment. So long as the Palestinian issue risks sparking unrest and violence, cooperation with Israel will remain quiet and limited in nature.

Seizing the opportunity posed by Israel-Arab shared interests, and developing the kind of intelligence and security cooperation that could be essential to effectively fight the radical forces of ISIS and to promote regional security and stability, requires responsibly addressing the Israeli-Palestinian issue and preventing it from becoming a new source of regional unrest.

ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

Israel has never formally responded to the Arab Peace Initiative (API). The API, first introduced in 2002, and reendorsed by the Arab League subsequently, offers Israel normal relations following a comprehensive peace agreement. Today, it deserves a new look by Israel and the United States as a vehicle for Israel-Arab dialogue and Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. Developments in recent years have revived the API’s relevance:
The Acceptance of Land Swaps
In the Spring of 2013 the Arab League accepted “comparable and mutually agreed minor swaps of the land,” as part of the API. This removes the previously unacceptable demand that Israel return to the 1967 Green Line and signals that the API should not be considered a take-it-or-leave-it proposition.

The Syrian Conflict
The API as issued in 2002 calls on Israel to withdraw “from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of June 4, 1967 as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.” The Syrian conflict has created a mutual interest in Israel’s maintaining its long-term presence on the Golan Heights. By responding to the API in this current environment, Israel will find an Arab League that is not encumbered by the views of Syria or its Hezbollah partners and potentially prepared to further amend the API accordingly.

Refugees
Some Israelis have criticized the API’s insistence on “a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194” interpreting the reference to UNGA 194 as a call for the full return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, upending Israel’s as both a Jewish and democratic state. In recent years, representatives of the Saudi royal family and other Arab actors have underscored that the phrase “agreed upon” signals a recognition that any resolution to the issue of refugees requires both Israeli and Palestinian consent, acknowledging that a full-scale return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants is not in the cards.

The API as an Action Plan, not a Trophy
Today, an agreement based on a land for peace formula with the Palestinians alone will not provide Israel with the security guarantees or regional integration that are necessary to forge a lasting, sustainable peace. Against the backdrop of regional unrest, and a weakened Palestinian leadership with an uncertain future, an effort to regionalize the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would be especially opportune.

A political ‘umbrella’ to the Palestinian side.
By serving as a chaperone for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Arab states can somewhat redress the imbalance between the government of Israel and the less potent PLO. Furthermore, at a time when the future of the Palestinian Authority leadership is uncertain, engaging regional actors now could be especially critical in ensuring a of support for continuity when future Palestinian leaders emerge.

Tangible Progress
Israel and the Arab states could together create a coordinated ‘zipper’ of pre-agreed mutual confidence-building measures to begin to demonstrate tangible progress and genuine intentions.

Check Spoilers
Coordinated efforts will be essential to counter Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the newer hostile players in proximity to the Israeli-Palestinian theatre such as ISIS affiliates.

Palestinian State Building
The Arab states can serve to revive the stalled efforts to bolster Palestinian institutions in preparation for eventual statehood, as well as encourage private initiatives to contribute financially and otherwise.

Business Opportunities
Arab states could begin open up investment and other business opportunities for, Palestinian and Israeli entrepreneurs.

Contribute to Regional Security
Alongside progress toward the creation of a two-state reality on the path toward an eventual two-state agreement, Israel and the Arab states should engage in a process to create a regional security framework, designed to improve security and intelligence cooperation in order to promote security and stability throughout the region.
Safeguarding the Future of Two States
The best path forward is to do everything possible to preserve the conditions for two states while improving Israel’s security.

By Michael J. Koplow

There are two dynamics that are presently framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and any attempts to address its resolution.

The first is that the two-state solution – Israel and Palestine living side by side – is the only path that establishes Israel in perpetuity as a secure Jewish and democratic state while fulfilling legitimate Palestinian national aspirations for a state of their own. Every other idea that has been floated is either fantastical, a recipe for civil war and ethnic strife, unworkable to the point of absurdity, or forces Israel to sacrifice its democratic history and ideals.

The second is that a return to bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, despite being the only way to achieve a permanent status agreement that establishes two states for two peoples, would be fruitless in the current political environment. Neither the Israeli government nor the Palestinian Authority has the requisite trust of the other side that would allow talks to succeed, and both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas are unlikely to be the leaders that oversee a successful permanent resolution to the conflict. Talking for talking’s sake is not cost-free; previous rounds of unsuccessful negotiations have not only been followed by violence after the talks collapsed, but failed peace talks have also only hardened both sides into intransigent positions on the menu of final status issues. While the Netanyahu government – to its credit – agreed to accept the framework laid out by Secretary Kerry in 2014, the current Israeli coalition and the pressure it brings to bear on Netanyahu from his right flank makes a repeat of this unlikely. On the Palestinian side, Abbas has still not responded to the Kerry framework and seems set on a strategy of internationalizing the conflict and appealing to multilateral organizations rather than talking with an Israeli government that he does not view as a serious interlocutor.

Given these two variables, the best path forward is to do everything possible to preserve the conditions for a two-state solution in the absence of a permanent status agreement while safeguarding and improving Israel’s security. Initiatives that accomplish these twin goals address Israeli existential fears that a Palestinian state will mean permanent insecurity for Israel, and address Palestinian existential fears that Israel’s continuing presence in the West Bank has already destroyed any possibility of a future Palestinian state. Only if Israel’s security is assured and Palestinians believe that there remains a viable political horizon will an environment conducive to negotiations ever reemerge.

The proposals contained in this briefing book accomplish these core objectives. They all simultaneously improve Israel’s security while establishing a two-state reality that is equitable to both sides and lays the groundwork for the future resolution of the core permanent status issues. Completing the security barrier will close the literal gap that allows Palestinians to cross illegally into Israel and help the security services and police combat terrorism, while at the same time establishing that Israel does not intend to remain sovereign over territory earmarked for a future Palestine. Rezoning parts of Area C that contain no Israeli structures or citizens into Area B to accommodate for Palestinian natural growth and improve territorial contiguity will bolster the Palestinian economy and reduce legitimate Palestinian grievances about unnecessary Israeli regulations while assisting the PA security forces in basic anti-terrorism and crime fighting tasks. Engaging in a regional dialogue with neighboring Arab countries in parallel to taking real measures on the Palestinian front allows Israel to contribute to and benefit from joint regional security and economic opportunities while ensuring that a powerful incentive exists to work toward establishing a Palestinian...