

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES December 8, 2003

Whose Peace?

Much has been written lately about several attempts to craft an alternative peace plan in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The best known of these recent plans - the "Geneva Initiative" - was conceived and written by representatives of both sides of the conflict, but without the involvement of governments or politicians. As such, it is a fresh approach that should provide a lesson to those who continue to believe that peace is something that can only be crafted by government officials, or bribed and bullied by the "international community".

We do know this: after decades of conflict and tens of billions of US taxpayer dollars spent, US government involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has led nowhere. The latest US government-initiated plan for peace, the "road map," appears to be a map to nowhere. This does not surprise me much. With a seemingly endless amount of money to bribe the leaders of the two opposing sides to remain engaged in the process, is it any wonder why the two parties never arrive at peace?

But people on both sides are becoming more and more frustrated with the endless impasse and endless government and bureaucrat-written peace agreements that go nowhere.

That is why plans like this should be of such interest. Initially conceived by an obscure Swiss professor, the project was joined by former Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, former Palestinian Authority Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo, and by other prominent individuals like former president Jimmy Carter. The negotiations led to the creation of a 50 page detailed accord.

I do not know whether the product is perfect. I have not studied the minute details of the proposal. But what I do know is that politicians, governments, and special interests promote war at the expense of those who have to fight them. Wars end when the victims finally demand peace. And that is what we are beginning to see. According to one recent survey, a majority

among both the Israeli and Palestinian population support this new initiative. That is encouraging.

To his credit, President Bush has demonstrated an open mind toward this alternative approach. He declared the Geneva Initiative “productive,” and added that the United States “appreciates people discussing peace.” Secretary of State Colin Powell echoed the president when he resisted hard-line pressure to ignore the proposed accord, stating, “I have an obligation to listen to individuals who have interesting ideas.” This is also encouraging.

Predictably, though, this new approach is not as welcomed by those-- governments, politicians, and special interests-- who have a stake in dragging out the process indefinitely. Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has been lukewarm at best. Extremist Arab organizations that have a special interest in continuing the violence have also rejected the Geneva Initiative. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has rejected the Initiative out of hand. Said Mr. Sharon: “Geneva is an attempt to do something only a government can do.”

But the point is that governments have little incentive to finally end conflicts such as these. The United States is in places like Kosovo and Bosnia indefinitely in the name of “peace-keeping” and “peace processes”. The same will be true of our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is not until foreign involvement ceases-- that means our continued meddling in the Middle East-- and the people involved demand peace that real working solutions begin to emerge. The Geneva Initiative is therefore a positive step toward peace in the Middle East. Let us step back and get out of the way!